

THE HOMELAND SECURITY *NEWS CLIPS*

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TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

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TODAY'S EDITION

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LEADING DHS NEWS

One Of The Largest Child Porn Rings In U.S. History Has Been Shut Down

By Sara Morrison

[The Wire](#), March 18, 2014

Fourteen men were charged with operating a child porn website with over 27,000 subscribers, the Department of Homeland Security announced today.

Over 250 children, mostly boys aged 13-15 (though there were some who were under the age of three), were victims of the ring, which was shut down in June 2013 when its alleged leaders were arrested.

"Never before in the history of this agency have we identified and located this many minor victims in the course of

a single child exploitation investigation,” said Immigration and Customs Enforcement Deputy Director Daniel Ragsdale.

The site was in operation for only a year. Victims came from 39 states and six countries, and most were tricked into sharing sexually explicit images. Men would pose as girls and connect with the boys on social media sites, then coerce them to perform sexual acts on their webcams. The site had tips on how to do this and upload the images without being caught by law enforcement. Ragsdale encouraged parents to educate their children to prevent this from happening again.

RELATED: Syria Creates a Space Agency in the Middle of its Civil War

It was only after someone sent something to a child via snail mail that the ring was discovered; the website escaped detection by operating on Tor.

Jonathan Johnson, 27, is accused of being the leader of the ring. He’s been in jail since his arrest last June and faces 20 years to life in prison. One of the 14 men arrested has already been sentenced to two 30 year terms, to be served concurrently. Another was a prominent immigration reform activist who was on the cover of Time in 2012. Hundreds of the site’s subscribers are being investigated as well, so more arrests are probably still to come.

14 Charged In Online Child Exploitation Network

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fourteen men were charged with operating an online child exploitation network that investigators said preyed upon hundreds of boys across the United States and overseas, authorities announced Tuesday.

Law enforcement officials said the arrests were part of a worrisome trend in which children are being enticed by adults to post sexually explicit images of themselves that are then shared online. In this case, authorities said, users of an underground network posed online as girls to coerce boys into sharing with them child pornography images.

“These alleged perpetrators preyed upon the most innocent, most vulnerable members of our society with no regard to the immediate or lasting harm they caused to their victims and their families,” Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said at a news conference.

The investigation, called “Operation Round Table,” was led by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and federal authorities in Louisiana, where the alleged leader of the operation lives.

The roughly 250 victims were spread across 39 states and five other countries — Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada and New Zealand. Most were boys between 13 and 15. Two victims were 3 or younger, authorities said.

The pornographic images were shared on an underground website on the Tor network, an online

anonymity network that masks the location of servers and conceals an Internet user’s location. The subscription-based website operated from about June 2012 until June 2013, had more than 27,000 members and shared more than 2,000 webcam-captured videos, mostly of young boys, authorities said.

Eleven of the 14 men, including the man authorities say was the administrator of the network, are being prosecuted in Louisiana. The other three are being charged in New York, Colorado and Wisconsin.

Authorities accuse Jonathan Johnson, of Abita Springs, La., of being the leader of the operation. They say he admitted creating multiple fake female personas from his home and encouraged others to do the same in an effort to entice boys to produce sexually explicit images of themselves. The 27-year-old also instructed members and uploaders on how to avoid getting caught by law enforcement, prosecutors say.

Online court records show Johnson was charged last month through a criminal information, a document that typically signals a guilty plea is near. A change of plea hearing is scheduled for March 27, according to the records. Johnson has been in custody since his arrest last June and faces from 20 years to life in prison.

A lawyer for Johnson did not immediately return a call seeking comment on Tuesday.

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Feds Bust Massive Porn Ring

By Shannon Firth

[US News & World Report](#), March 19, 2014

Federal officials arrested 14 men Tuesday suspected of running a massive child pornography website that victimized 251 children via an underground network, according to reports.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in collaboration with several other federal agencies, were part of an extensive and widespread child exploitation investigation known as “Operation Round Table,” reported CNET.

“Never before in the history of this agency have we identified and located this many minor victims in the course of a single child exploitation investigation,” said Daniel Ragsdale, deputy director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, in a statement.

The 14 men are suspected of running a subscription-based website which operated via a hidden network known as Darknet’s Onion Router or Tor. The network allows users to mask their locations.

“I am proud of the work done by the [Homeland Security Investigations] special agents to not only detect this operation and arrest those involved in the conspiracy, but

also their efforts to identify and bring support to the many young victims and their families,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson said in the release.

[ALSO: Prosecutors Attempt to Block Tsarnaev From Victim Photos]

The investigators who led “Operation Round Table” said Jonathan Johnson 27, of Abita Springs, La., the site’s alleged administrator, has been charged with leading the illicit venture. Johnson admitted to creating fake female profiles and using them to dupe boys and young men into recording explicit videos.

More than half of the victims were between 13 and 15 years old and male, although two were three years old or younger. The victims live in 39 states and five countries as far away as Australia and New Zealand.

The site operated from June 2012 to June 2013 and had as many as 27,000 subscribers. Over 300 operations based in the U.S. and abroad are investigating the site’s members.

Federal Investigators Reveal Massive Child Porn Bust

By Sebastian Robertson

[WFAA-TV Dallas](#), March 20, 2014

DALLAS — The Department of Homeland Security announced a major child pornography bust on Tuesday morning. The department says it involves the largest number of victims every identified and contacted by law enforcement as a part of a single investigation.

Dubbed “Operation Round Table,” the scope of the investigation is massive. After a two-year investigation, 14 men are behind bars, arrested and charged as part of a conspiracy to run a hidden child porn website.

Officials uncovered 251 victims across the globe — 15 of them in North Texas. Law enforcement officials said in many cases, the victims did not know their photos were being shared.

“Let me be clear — all were children under the age of 17, and some were under three years old,” said Special Agent David M. Marwell of Homeland Security Investigations.

The underground website ran on a special type of secret network, what’s often called the “deep web.” In a year’s time, the site contained more than 200 videos and hosted more than 27,000 members.

Investigators allege 27-year-old Jonathan Johnson of Abita Springs, Louisiana was the head administrator.

“Many of the victims in this case did not even realize they were, in fact, victims,” Marwell said at Tuesday morning’s media briefing.

Investigators said Johnson admitted to creating fake female personas to entice mostly young men.

“The perpetrators of this child exploitation enterprise sought out young boys to entice to produce child pornography of themselves,” Marwell said.

Johnson is now facing 20 years to life in federal custody.

While investigators have 14 men off the streets, they need your help finding another.

Homeland Security investigators say they have information about an unknown suspect who sexually exploited a baby. They believe he lived in North Texas in April 2013, and hope with your help they can find him. Call 866-347-2423 if you have any information, or use the confidential Homeland Security online tip form.

Over 250 Victims Identified In Vast Porn Bust

[KDBC-TV El Paso \(TX\)](#), March 20, 2014

El Paso, TX — Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Jeh Johnson, with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana today announced the complete results of one of the largest online child exploitation investigations in the history of ICE, involving victims in 39 states and five countries.

Fourteen men operating a child pornography website on the Darknet’s Onion Router, also known as Tor, have been arrested and charged as part of a conspiracy to operate a child exploitation enterprise, following an extensive international investigation by ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and USPIS. Eleven have been federally charged in the Eastern District of Louisiana and three in other districts. All are in federal custody.

“Every day the men and women of the Department of Homeland Security work to keep our nation safe and a major part of that effort is the work of ICE Homeland Security Investigations, one of the largest investigative agencies with jurisdiction over a wide range of crimes spanning the U.S. and the entire globe,” said Secretary Johnson. “I am proud of the work done by the HSI special agents to not only detect this operation and arrest those involved in the conspiracy, but also their efforts to identify and bring support to the many young victims and their families.”

So far, investigators have identified 251 minor victims in 39 states and five foreign countries: 228 in the United States and 23 in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Belgium. Eight of the victims were female and 243 were male. The majority of victims, 159, were 13 to 15 years old. Fifty nine victims were 16 and 17; 26 victims were 10 to 12; four victims were 7 to 9; one victim was 4 to 6; and two victims were 3 years old or younger. All victims have been contacted by law enforcement and U.S. victims offered support services from HSI victim assistance specialists. According to ICE media specialists, two victims were from the Albuquerque area.

"These indictments represent a strong coordinated strike – by Homeland Security, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and several U. S. Attorney's Offices around the country – against child pornography and those who allegedly seek to harm our most vulnerable citizens, our young children," stated U. S. Attorney Kenneth Allen Polite, Jr.

The website's primary administrator, Jonathan Johnson, 27, of Abita Springs, La., has been charged with operating a child exploitation enterprise. He admitted to creating multiple fake female personas on popular social networks to target and sexually exploit children and to coaching other child predators in his inner circle to do the same. Jonathan Johnson has been in federal custody since his arrest June 13, 2013, and faces 20 years to life in prison.

"Never before in the history of this agency have we identified and located this many minor victims in the course of a single child exploitation investigation," said ICE Deputy Director Daniel Ragsdale. "Our agency is seeing a growing trend where children are being enticed, tricked and coerced online by adults to produce sexually explicit material of themselves. While we will continue to prioritize the arrest of child predators, we cannot arrest our way out of this problem: education is the key to prevention."

"Protecting children from crimes of sexual abuse and exploitation is a priority for the U.S. Postal Inspection Service," stated Gerald O'Farrell, inspector in charge of Criminal Investigations, National Headquarters. "I'm proud of the work of the Postal Inspection Service and our investigative partners to bring child predators to justice. U.S. Postal inspectors have investigated these crimes for more than a century. While the predators' use of sophisticated technology has evolved, the core harm has not changed: a child's lost innocence. We will not lose sight of this, and remain steadfast in our efforts to investigate, apprehend, and assist in the prosecution of those who seek to exploit children via the U.S. mail."

The underground website was a hidden service board on the Tor network and operated from about June 2012 until June 2013, at which time the site contained more than 2,000 videos and had more than 27,000 members. The website shared webcam-captured videos of mostly juvenile boys enticed by the operators of the site to produce sexually explicit material. Tor enables online anonymity, directing Internet traffic through a volunteer network consisting of thousands of relays to conceal a user's location.

The investigation was dubbed 'Operation Round Table' and began with the arrest of Jonathan Johnson by USPS and HSI. Further computer forensic analysis by HSI revealed Jonathan Johnson to be the creator and administrator of the underground website.

Ten additional individuals have been arrested and charged in the Eastern District of Louisiana as the primary

operators, contributors and producers of material for the child exploitation enterprise:

Daniel Nolan Devor, 39, of Brunswick, Ga., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, distribution of child pornography and receipt of materials involving the sexual exploitation of minors

John C. Foster, 44 of Tipp City, Ohio, charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and receipt of materials involving the sexual exploitation of minors

Aung Gaw aka Michael Gaw, 25, of Fremont, Calif., charged with receipt of child pornography

Vittorio Francesco Gonzalez-Castillo, 26, of Tucson, Ariz., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography

Sean Jabbar, 32, of Minneapolis, Minn., charged with receipt of child pornography

Christopher Jamieson, 30, of Douglassville, Ga., charged with receipt of child pornography

Andrew Korpai, 29, of Granger, Ind., charged with receipt of child pornography

Nicholas Saine, 27, of Seattle, Wash., charged with receipt of child pornography

Christopher Schwab, 25 of New Orleans, charged with production of child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and receipt of child pornography

Stanley Zdon, III, 27, of Tuckerton, N.J., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography

Roy Naim, 30, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was charged in the Eastern District of New York with conspiracy to produce child pornography, attempted sexual exploitation of a child, receipt of child pornography, and possession of child pornography. Minh Vi Thong, 30, of Denver, Colo., was charged in the District of Colorado with production of child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and possession of child pornography. Michael Eales, 24, of Westby, Wis., was charged in the Western District of Wisconsin with production of child pornography. He was sentenced Oct. 29, 2013, to serve two concurrent 30-year terms in federal prison, followed by a lifetime of supervised release, for manufacturing child pornography.

More than 300 investigations have been opened into potential subscribers of the website: 150 in the United States and 150 overseas. Investigators anticipate ongoing arrests and additional identification of victims as they continue to examine and analyze the more than 40 terabytes of data seized.

The prosecution of this case in the Eastern District of Louisiana is being handled by Fraud Unit Chief and Project Safe Childhood Coordinator, Assistant U. S. Attorney Brian M. Klebba.

Substantial assistance in this ongoing case is being provided by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the U.S. Department of Justice's Child Exploitation

and Obscenity Section, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Operation Round Table was conducted as part of HSI's Operation Predator to identify and rescue victims of online sexual exploitation and to arrest their abusers as well as others who own, trade and produce images of child pornography.

Last fiscal year, 2,099 child predators were arrested by HSI on criminal charges related to the online sexual exploitation of children. In 2012, 1,655 child predators were arrested, 1,335 were arrested in 2011, and 912 were arrested in 2010. Since 2003, HSI has initiated more than 29,000 cases and arrested more than 10,000 individuals for these types of crimes. HSI encourages the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE or by completing its online tip form. Both are staffed around the clock by investigators. Tips can also be made through HSI's Operation Predator smartphone app, which can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/1eixbIM>. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, via its toll-free 24-hour hotline, 1-800-THE-LOST.

You may also visit us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, or access this news release on your mobile device.

4 Tyler Children Among Over 250 Victims Identified In Vast Porn Bust

[KETK-TV Tyler \(TX\)](#), March 20, 2014

Tyler, Texas (KETK) — Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Jeh Johnson, with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana today announced the complete results of one of the largest online child exploitation investigations in the history of ICE, involving victims in 39 states and five countries.

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"Every day the men and women of the Department of Homeland Security work to keep our nation safe and a major part of that effort is the work of ICE Homeland Security Investigations, one of the largest investigative agencies with jurisdiction over a wide range of crimes spanning the U.S. and the entire globe," said Secretary Johnson. "I am proud of the work done by the HSI special agents to not only detect

this operation and arrest those involved in the conspiracy, but also their efforts to identify and bring support to the many young victims and their families."

So far, investigators have identified 251 minor victims in 39 states and five foreign countries: 228 in the United States and 23 in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Belgium. Eight of the victims were female and 243 were male. The majority of victims, 159, were 13 to 15 years old. Fifty nine victims were 16 and 17; 26 victims were 10 to 12; four victims were 7 to 9; one victim was 4 to 6; and two victims were 3 years old or younger. All victims have been contacted by law enforcement and U.S. victims offered support services from HSI victim assistance specialists. According to ICE media specialists, four of the children were from Tyler.

"These indictments represent a strong coordinated strike – by Homeland Security, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and several U. S. Attorney's Offices around the country – against child pornography and those who allegedly seek to harm our most vulnerable citizens, our young children," stated U. S. Attorney Kenneth Allen Polite, Jr.

The website's primary administrator, Jonathan Johnson, 27, of Abita Springs, La., has been charged with operating a child exploitation enterprise. He admitted to creating multiple fake female personas on popular social networks to target and sexually exploit children and to coaching other child predators in his inner circle to do the same. Jonathan Johnson has been in federal custody since his arrest June 13, 2013, and faces 20 years to life in prison.

"Never before in the history of this agency have we identified and located this many minor victims in the course of a single child exploitation investigation," said ICE Deputy Director Daniel Ragsdale. "Our agency is seeing a growing trend where children are being enticed, tricked and coerced online by adults to produce sexually explicit material of themselves. While we will continue to prioritize the arrest of child predators, we cannot arrest our way out of this problem: education is the key to prevention."

"Protecting children from crimes of sexual abuse and exploitation is a priority for the U.S. Postal Inspection Service," stated Gerald O'Farrell, inspector in charge of Criminal Investigations, National Headquarters. "I'm proud of the work of the Postal Inspection Service and our investigative partners to bring child predators to justice. U.S. Postal inspectors have investigated these crimes for more than a century. While the predators' use of sophisticated technology has evolved, the core harm has not changed: a child's lost innocence. We will not lose sight of this, and remain steadfast in our efforts to investigate, apprehend, and assist in the prosecution of those who seek to exploit children via the U.S. mail."

The underground website was a hidden service board on the Tor network and operated from about June 2012 until

June 2013, at which time the site contained more than 2,000 videos and had more than 27,000 members. The website shared webcam-captured videos of mostly juvenile boys enticed by the operators of the site to produce sexually explicit material. Tor enables online anonymity, directing Internet traffic through a volunteer network consisting of thousands of relays to conceal a user's location.

The investigation was dubbed 'Operation Round Table' and began with the arrest of Jonathan Johnson by USPIS and HSI. Further computer forensic analysis by HSI revealed Jonathan Johnson to be the creator and administrator of the underground website.

Ten additional individuals have been arrested and charged in the Eastern District of Louisiana as the primary operators, contributors and producers of material for the child exploitation enterprise:

Daniel Nolan Devor, 39, of Brunswick, Ga., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, distribution of child pornography and receipt of materials involving the sexual exploitation of minors

John C. Foster, 44 of Tipp City, Ohio, charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and receipt of materials involving the sexual exploitation of minors

Aung Gaw aka Michael Gaw, 25, of Fremont, Calif., charged with receipt of child pornography

Vittorio Francesco Gonzalez-Castillo, 26, of Tucson, Ariz., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography

Sean Jabbar, 32, of Minneapolis, Minn., charged with receipt of child pornography

Christopher Jamieson, 30, of Douglassville, Ga., charged with receipt of child pornography

Andrew Korpai, 29, of Granger, Ind., charged with receipt of child pornography

Nicholas Saine, 27, of Seattle, Wash., charged with receipt of child pornography

Christopher Schwab, 25 of New Orleans, charged with production of child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and receipt of child pornography

Stanley Zdon, III, 27, of Tuckerton, N.J., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography

Roy Naim, 30, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was charged in the Eastern District of New York with conspiracy to produce child pornography, attempted sexual exploitation of a child, receipt of child pornography, and possession of child pornography. Minh Vi Thong, 30, of Denver, Colo., was charged in the District of Colorado with production of child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and possession of child pornography. Michael Eales, 24, of Westby, Wis., was charged in the Western District of Wisconsin with production of child pornography. He was sentenced Oct. 29, 2013, to serve two concurrent 30-year terms in federal prison, followed

by a lifetime of supervised release, for manufacturing child pornography.

More than 300 investigations have been opened into potential subscribers of the website: 150 in the United States and 150 overseas. Investigators anticipate ongoing arrests and additional identification of victims as they continue to examine and analyze the more than 40 terabytes of data seized.

The prosecution of this case in the Eastern District of Louisiana is being handled by Fraud Unit Chief and Project Safe Childhood Coordinator, Assistant U. S. Attorney Brian M. Klebba.

Substantial assistance in this ongoing case is being provided by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the U.S. Department of Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Operation Round Table was conducted as part of HSI's Operation Predator to identify and rescue victims of online sexual exploitation and to arrest their abusers as well as others who own, trade and produce images of child pornography.

Last fiscal year, 2,099 child predators were arrested by HSI on criminal charges related to the online sexual exploitation of children. In 2012, 1,655 child predators were arrested, 1,335 were arrested in 2011, and 912 were arrested in 2010. Since 2003, HSI has initiated more than 29,000 cases and arrested more than 10,000 individuals for these types of crimes. HSI encourages the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE or by completing its online tip form. Both are staffed around the clock by investigators. Tips can also be made through HSI's Operation Predator smartphone app, which can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/1eixblM>. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, via its toll-free 24-hour hotline, 1-800-THE-LOST.

You may also visit us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, or access this news release on your mobile device.

Online Child-exploitation Network Preyed On Canadian Boys

[Halifax \(CAN\) Chronicle Herald](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — U.S. authorities say 14 men have been charged with operating an online child-exploitation network that preyed upon hundreds of boys in the United States, Canada and overseas.

Law enforcement officials say the arrests were part of a worrisome trend in which children are being enticed into posting sexually explicit images of themselves, and then those images are broadly shared online.

In this case, authorities say users of an underground network posed online as girls to persuade boys into sharing child pornography images with them.

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson says the alleged perpetrators preyed upon the most innocent, most vulnerable members of the society with no regard to the immediate or lasting harm they caused to their victims and their families.

The 250 victims were spread across 39 states and five other countries — Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada and New Zealand. Most were boys between 13 and 15. Two victims were 3 or younger.

Authorities did not immediately respond to a request for more information on the alleged Canadian victims.

The images and videos were shared on an underground website on the Tor network, an online anonymity network that masks the location of servers and conceals an Internet user's location. The subscription-based website operated from about June 2012 until June 2013 and had more than 27,000 members and 2,000 online videos, authorities said.

Police have opened more than 300 investigations into potential subscribers of the website: 150 in the United States and 150 overseas.

Investigators said they anticipate ongoing arrests and additional identification of victims.

Eleven of the 14 men, including the man authorities say was the administrator of the network, are being prosecuted in Louisiana. The other three are being charged in New York, Colorado and Wisconsin.

Authorities accuse Jonathan Johnson of Abita Springs, La., of being the leader of the operation. They said he admitted creating multiple fake female personas from his home and encouraged others to do the same in an effort to entice boys to produce sexually explicit images of themselves.

Court papers show Johnson was charged last month through a criminal information, a document that can only be filed with an accused's consent. It signals a guilty plea.

A lawyer for Johnson did not immediately return a call seeking comment on Tuesday.

The investigation was led by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Child Exploitation Ring Busted: 14 Arrests

[Yahoo! News UK](#), March 20, 2014

Authorities have arrested 14 men in connection with a child abuse images website that involved 251 children, mostly boys, in the US and other countries.

The victims ranged in age from three to 17, officials from the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement said.

The vast majority of the children came from across the US, while 23 were identified in Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Belgium.

The organisation is "one of the largest known online child exploitation operations in history", Department of Homeland Security chief Jeh Johnson told reporters.

The suspects were charged with conspiracy to operate a child exploitation enterprise.

Some of the men assumed female online personas to connect with the children on popular social networks and lure them into providing sexually explicit material.

By the time it was dismantled, the illegal website contained more than 2,000 shared webcam-captured videos of mostly juvenile boys.

The website had more than 27,000 subscribers, according to officials.

Some of the subscribers have been arrested on lesser charges, though authorities did not give a figure.

But they said that at least 300 people in the US and abroad are under investigation.

The website shared videos of boys enticed into providing sexually explicit material through Tor, which allows online anonymity by routing internet traffic in a way that conceals a user's location, authorities said.

Among those arrested is the website's suspected main administrator, Jonathan Johnson, a 27-year-old from Louisiana.

If convicted, he faces 20 years to life in prison.

Child Porn Ring Busted, Officials Say

[KFVE-TV Honolulu](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON, DC (CNN) – Federal officials say they've busted a major international child porn ring.

Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson announced the arrests of more than a dozen men.

Authorities say they ran a child pornography website.

"The primary target of Operation Roundtable was the administrator of a subscription-based website," Johnson said. "The site had more than 27,000 members involved in producing and distributing child pornography on a massive scale. A majority of the victims of these heinous crimes were between the ages of 13 and 15, with two victims under the age of 3. To date, 14 individuals have been arrested in connection to this investigation with additional arrests expected in the United States and overseas."

Investigators say they've identified more than 250 child victims in 39 states and five foreign countries. The suspects are all in federal custody.

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N.J. Man Arrested In One Of History's Largest Online Child Porn Stings, Feds Say

By Alex Napolitano

[New Jersey](#), March 20, 2014

An Ocean County man was arrested in connection with a massive child pornography ring that involved over 251 victims in 39 states and five foreign countries, federal officials said.

Stanley Zdon III, 27, of Tuckerton, was one of 14 people charged as part of Operation Round Table, one of the "largest online child exploitation investigations" in history, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced Tuesday.

Zdon and the 13 others arrested allegedly operated a child pornography website on the Tor network, an online platform used to protect a web user's location and ensure anonymity on the Internet. Authorities said the site contained more than 2,000 videos and had more than 27,000 members.

According to federal officials, users of the website shared webcam videos of mostly juvenile boys enticed by operators of the site to "produce sexually explicit material." The majority of the victims were 13 – to 15-years-old, officials said.

Zdon was arrested and charged in the Eastern District of Louisiana with conspiracy to produce child pornography.

Stanley Zdon III Of Tuckerton Nabbed In Child Porn Investigation

[Asbury Park \(NJ\) Press](#), March 19, 2014

A Tuckerton man was charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography in one of the largest online child exploitation investigations in the history of Immigrations Customs Enforcement, authorities said..

Stanley Zdon, III, 27, of Tuckerton, was one of 14 men charged in connection with operating a child pornography website on the Darknet's Onion Router, also known as Tor. The router allows for anonymous Internet sites and users to produce materials without authorities detecting the originator, according to web descriptions on Forbes.com.

"Operation Round Table" was conducted as part of Homeland Security's Operation Predator aimed at identifying and rescuing victims of online sexual exploitation and to arrest abusers as well as others who own, trade and produce images of child pornography.

The international investigation involved victims from 39 states and five countries, according to a release from Homeland Security.

Authorities encourage the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 866-DHS-2-ICE or by completing its online tip form.

Zdon is in federal custody, authorities said.

Tucson Man Arrested In Federal Child-porn Sweep

[Arizona Daily Star](#), March 20, 2014

A Tucson man has been arrested by federal authorities who dismantled an extended network of child-pornography producers, officials say.

Vittorio Francesco Gonzalez-Castillo, 26, was arrested in January in connection with the child-pornography production and distribution organization.

A U.S. Department of Homeland Security news release provided some details of the investigation, which included 228 minor victims in 39 states and 23 victims in other countries.

The release described how those accused in the case used an underground website from about June 2012 until June 2013 to distribute more than 2,000 child-pornography videos.

The site was concealed on the so-called Tor Network, a software system that can provide Internet users and websites online anonymity by directing traffic through a network of relays.

More than 27,000 people were members of the clandestine site, according to a news release. The site shared webcam-captured videos of mostly juvenile boys who were enticed by the operators of the site to produce sexually explicit material.

The ages of the victims range from 3 to 17 years old, the release said.

Federal authorities called the investigation "Operation Round Table," which became public with the 2013 arrest of Jonathan Johnson in Louisiana. Forensic analysis federal authorities conducted indicated that Johnson was the creator and administrator of the underground site.

"Never before in the history of this agency have we identified and located this many minor victims in the course of a single child-exploitation investigation," Immigration and Customs Enforcement Deputy Director Daniel Ragsdale said in a news release. "Our agency is seeing a growing trend where children are being enticed, tricked and coerced online by adults to produce sexually explicit material of themselves."

Federal officials accuse Johnson of creating multiple online identities to communicate with and coerce minors to create the sexually explicit material.

Gonzalez-Castillo was charged in January in a Louisiana federal court with one count of conspiracy to produce child pornography. The indictment accuses him of using similar means as Johnson to acquire content for the clandestine site.

If convicted, he could face as many as 30 years in prison.

In addition to those charges, Gonzalez-Castillo already faced child-pornography-related charges in a federal court in Tucson.

He was charged in February 2013 with distribution of child pornography, possession of child pornography and

knowing how to access child pornography in the Arizona case.

In total, federal authorities have arrested 14 men across the country in connection with the child-pornography network.

One man already has pleaded guilty in connection to the case in Wisconsin and is serving a 30-year prison term for sexual exploitation of children.

Feds Breakup Child-porn Ring, Tucsonan Among The Accused

[Arizona Daily Star](#), March 20, 2014

Federal authorities have announced the breakup of an extended network of child-pornography producers, which includes the arrest of a Tucson man.

A U.S. Department of Homeland Security news release provided some details of the investigation, which included 228 minor victims in 39 states and 23 victims in other countries.

Vittorio Francesco Gonzalez-Castillo, 26, was one of 14 men arrested in January in connection with the child-pornography production and distribution organization.

Gonzalez-Castillo was charged in federal court in Louisiana with one count of conspiracy to produce child pornography.

A news release described how those accused in the case used an underground website from about June 2012 until June 2013 to distribute more than 2,000 videos.

The site was concealed on the so-called Tor Network, a software system that can provide Internet users and Web sites online anonymity by directing traffic through a network of relays.

The site had more than 27,000 members, according to a news release.

The site shared webcam-captured videos of mostly juvenile boys who were enticed by the operators of the site to produce sexually explicit material.

Federal authorities called the investigation "Operation Round Table," which began with the arrest of Jonathan Johnson in Louisiana. Forensic analysis indicated that Johnson was the creator and administrator of the underground website.

The other men arrested in connection with the investigation include:

Daniel Nolan Devor, 39, of Brunswick, Ga., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, distribution of child pornography and receipt of materials involving the sexual exploitation of minors;

John C. Foster, 44 of Tipp City, Ohio, charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and receipt of materials involving the sexual exploitation of minors;

Aung Gaw aka Michael Gaw, 25, of Fremont, Calif., charged with receipt of child pornography;

Sean Jabbar, 32, of Minneapolis, Minn., charged with receipt of child pornography

Christopher Jamieson, 30, of Douglassville, Ga., charged with receipt of child pornography;

Andrew Korpai, 29, of Granger, Ind., charged with receipt of child pornography;

Nicholas Saine, 27, of Seattle, Wash., charged with receipt of child pornography;

Christopher Schwab, 25 of New Orleans, charged with production of child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and receipt of child pornography;

Stanley Zdon, III, 27, of Tuckerton, N.J., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography.

Roy Naim, 30, of Brooklyn, N.Y., charged with conspiracy to produce child pornography, attempted sexual exploitation of a child, receipt of child pornography, and possession of child pornography;

Minh Vi Thong, 30, of Denver, Colo., charged with production of child pornography, distribution of child pornography, and possession of child pornography.

Another man already convicted in the case, Michael Eales, 24, of Westby, Wis., was sentenced in October to 30 years in federal prison, followed by a lifetime of supervised release, for manufacturing child pornography.

Tucson Man Arrested In Large Child Porn Ring Bust

By Dennis Lambert

[KJZZ-FM Phoenix](#), March 20, 2014

A Tucson man and 13 others have been arrested in what Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said was an international child pornography ring.

"One of the largest known online child exploitation operations in history, involving about 250 victims in 39 states and five countries," Johnson said.

Johnson said there could be many more arrests both in the United States and overseas. He said the site had more than 27,000 members involved in producing and distributing child pornography on what he calls a massive scale.

Two Local Boys Fall Victim To Child Pornography Ring

[KSAN-TV San Angelo \(TX\)](#), March 20, 2014

14 men have been arrested in connection with Operation Round Table. One of the largest child exploitation investigations in the history of the Department of Homeland Security.

The Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement released information obtained through Operation Round Table. The investigation

led to the arrest of 14 men in connection with running a world wide underground child pornography ring. The investigation identified 251 victims between the ages of 3 to 17 in 39 states of the U.S. and 5 countries. The majority of the victims were in the U.S. with 15 victims are located in the state of Texas. Two of those victims, both male between the ages of 12 and 13, are located in San Angelo.

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Authorities Say Two Victims Discovered In International Child Porn Sting Are From San Angelo

[San Angelo \(TX\) Standard-Times](#), March 19, 2014

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Westby Man Part Of International Child Pornography Ring

[La Crosse \(WI\) Tribune](#), March 20, 2014

A Westby man was among those arrested as part of the largest online child exploitation investigations in the history of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Michael Eales, 24, was one of 14 men charged federally with running a child pornography website on the Darknet's Onion Router.

He was sentenced in October to 30 years in federal prison for using an 18-month-old boy to make child pornography which he distributed live on the internet.

Investigators identified 251 victims who were minors, most males ages 13 to 15, in 39 states and five other countries in the massive investigation. All were offered support services.

"Never before in the history of this agency have we identified and located this many minor victims in the course of a single child exploitation investigation," ICE Deputy Director Daniel Ragsdale said. "Our agency is seeing a growing trend

where children are being enticed, tricked and coerced online by adults to produce sexually explicit material of themselves."

The website's administrator, 27-year-old Jonathan Johnson of Abita Springs, La., admitted to creating fake female accounts on social networks to target and sexually exploit children and to coaching other child predators to do the same. He faces life in prison.

The underground website was a hidden service board on the Tor network and operated from June 2012 until June 2013, when the site contained more than 2,000 videos and had more than 27,000 members.

The site shared videos of minors enticed by the operators of the site to produce sexually explicit material. Tor enables online anonymity, directing Internet traffic through a volunteer network consisting of thousands of relays to conceal a user's location.

More than 300 investigations have been opened into potential subscribers of the website. More arrests are expected.

KEYC – Mankato News, Weather, Sports – – Child Porn Ring Busted; Minnesota And Iowa Victims

By Mitch Keegan

[KEYC-TV Mankato \(MN\)](#), March 20, 2014

Authorities say one of 14 men charged with operating an online child exploitation network was arrested in Minnesota.

The federal government announced the results of operation roundtable" today... busting up what they're calling a "major international operation" ... Targeting an underground child pornography website.

Jeh Johnson with the Department of Homeland Security says, "The site had more than 27,000 members involved in producing and distributing child pornography on a massive scale, the majority of the victims of these heinous crimes were between the ages of 13 and 15, with 2 victims under the age of 3."

A Minnesota ICE spokesman says 12 victims are from Minnesota, with an average age ranging from 13 to 16. Six victims were in Iowa.

Two NZ Boys In Exploitation Ring

[Sky News Australia](#), March 20, 2014

Two New Zealand children are among 250 children to be exploited on a United States website.

American authorities have arrested and charged the website's administrator Jonathan Johnson, 27, and 13 other people after children, mainly young boys, were exploited online, AFP reports.

More than 250 children, who live in six countries, were victims of the ring – which AFP reports shared 2000 webcam-

captured videos of juvenile boys enticed by the website's operators to produce sexually explicit material.

Two New Zealand boys, aged 12 and 13, were identified by New Zealand police's Online Child Exploitation Across New Zealand group.

Detective Senior Sergeant John Michael said steps have been taken to ensure the safety of those children.

'This investigation highlights the fact that the internet allows predators to exploit children around the world, even in the safety of their own homes,' Sen Sgt Michael said.

The secret members-only website, with over 27,000 subscribers, was uncovered in what US authorities are calling one of the largest operations ever.

Child victims were also identified in Australia, the United States, Great Britain, Canada and Belgium.

The illicit website operated on a hidden service board on the Tor network from about June 2012 until June 2013, AFP reports.

Sen Sgt Michael says the operation, dubbed Operation Roundtable, is an example of international law enforcement agencies working together to stop online child exploitation.

Two Kiwi Boys Caught In Huge US Child Porn Ring

[New Zealand Herald](#), March 20, 2014

Two New Zealand boys are among 251 victims of a massive international online child pornography ring busted in the United States.

New Zealand police confirmed the two boys, aged 12 and 13, were among the victims of the members-only online network which had more than 27,000 subscribers.

Fourteen men had been arrested in the United States, but there had been no arrests here, a New Zealand police spokesman said.

No one in New Zealand would face charges over the child porn ring, which had links to victims in Australia, Britain, Canada and Belgium.

Video

"The New Zealand Police received information from United States authorities that New Zealand children had been victimised by a US based online child exploitation group," Detective Senior Sergeant John Michael said.

"During our investigation police identified two young male victims in New Zealand, aged 12 and 13, that had been exploited and were able to take steps to ensure their safety," he said in a statement.

US authorities said it was one of the largest such operations ever uncovered, Agence France-Presse reported.

The website's victims – 243 boys and eight girls, lived in five foreign countries and 39 US states, officials said.

Authorities said the victims, were, for the most part, boys between the ages of 10 and 17.

The organisation was "one of the largest known online child exploitation operations in history", Department of Homeland Security chief Jeh Johnson said.

Among the suspects taken into custody was Jonathan Johnson, 27, the administrator of the website, which operated out the southern US state of Louisiana, AFP reported.

If convicted, Johnson faced 20 years to life in prison, said Kenneth Allen Polite, US Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

"These indictments represent a strong co-ordinated strike ... against child pornography and those who allegedly seek to harm our most vulnerable citizens, our young children," Mr Polite said.

The illicit website operated on a hidden service board on the Tor network from about June 2012 until June 2013, when Johnson was arrested.

The Tor network is set up to conceal user's location, making it possible to maintain online anonymity.

Authorities said the website contained more than 2000 shared webcam-captured videos of mostly juvenile boys enticed by the website's operators to produce sexually explicit material.

Mr Michael said the investigation highlighted the fact that the internet allowed predators to exploit children around the world, even in the safety of their own homes.

"The high level of co-operation during Operation Roundtable demonstrates the willingness of international law enforcement agencies to combat online child exploitation," he said.

Nevada Delegation Cheers Renewal Of Anti-terror Funding To Las Vegas

By Karoun Demirjian

[Las Vegas Sun](#), March 18, 2014

After a full-court press from the Nevada congressional delegation, the Department of Homeland Security is restoring special counterterrorism funding to Las Vegas.

"I'm pleased that U.S. Department of Homeland Security has once again understood that Las Vegas deserves these important funds to help prepare our community and law enforcement to respond in the event of a disaster," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Tuesday.

Last year, Las Vegas didn't make the cut of cities to receive money from the department's Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) after the number of recipient cities was capped at the 25 considered the most risk-prone.

Members of the delegation representing Southern Nevada attempted to plead Las Vegas' case, even attempting legislation to include Las Vegas and nine other cities on the UASI list.

Those efforts were unsuccessful. But in fiscal 2014, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will provide 39 cities with the funding.

Las Vegas will receive \$1 million of the \$578 million being distributed.

It's not a huge percentage, but the provision of UASI funding to Las Vegas reflects an understanding by Homeland Security that its current risk assessment model leaves cities like Las Vegas and other tourist destinations — such as Orlando, Fla. — out of consideration.

"It does not adequately factor in the unique characterization and needs of tourism-based economies like the one I represent," Rep. Steven Horsford, D-Nev., told Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson in a hearing last month, requesting that the risk assessment model be reviewed.

"I understand the concerns around potential threats to tourism," Johnson told Horsford. "I get that."

The risk assessment method hasn't yet been completely changed. But Las Vegas was able to make the cut this year because of language put in the fiscal 2014 budget, which allowed Homeland Security to name other recipient cities as necessary.

"While (Homeland Security) has not yet changed the modeling with which they assess risk, today's announcement is a step in the right direction toward accurately evaluating the threats posed to Las Vegas and the Silver State," Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., said.

Now the goal of the Nevada delegation shifts to ensuring the funding doesn't disappear again.

"I applaud the decision to award Las Vegas this crucial grant funding, which will be utilized to keep both Las Vegas residents and visitors safe," Rep. Joe Heck, R-Nev., said. "I remain committed to working to ensure that this funding is maintained in the future so that our local law enforcement and homeland security officials can adequately defend the city against terrorist threats."

"I have been calling on (Homeland Security) to include Las Vegas on the UASI list since our community was unwisely omitted from the program last year," said Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev. "I will continue to press to improve their risk analysis to better reflect the needs of Southern Nevada."

Indiana Getting \$5 Million In US Security Grants

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) – U.S. Sen. Dan Coats says \$5 million in federal homeland security grants will be used well in Indiana.

Coats announced Tuesday that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security was releasing the money to Indiana to be used for disaster preparation.

The state will receive two grants to help it prepare for any potential terrorist attacks, major disasters or other emergencies. The state will receive a \$1 million Urban Area Securities Grant and \$4 million from the State Homeland Security Grant Program.

Coats is the ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security.

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Hampton Roads To Receive \$1 Million For Homeland Security

[WVEC-TV Hampton Roads \(VA\)](#), March 20, 2014

RICHMOND – Hampton Roads will receive \$1 million of \$7.4 million in funds from a Homeland Security Grant Program, Gov. Terry McAuliffe announced Wednesday.

The Hampton Roads region, along with National Capital region, was identified as a high-threat, high-density urban area.

The money from the Urban Areas Security Initiative cover costs of law enforcement and terrorism prevention and typically include training and exercises, updates to current planning and procedures, and equipment replacement

The region has received funding from the program before. This year's amount is a 15% increase, he noted.

"This significant increase in federal homeland security grant funding will greatly improve Virginia's ability to keep our families, communities and economic assets safe," said Governor McAuliffe. "As home to some of the world's largest military installations and critical government infrastructure, Virginia is a strategic partner in national defense and homeland security. These funds are vital to us as we plan and prepare for known and unknown threats," Gov. McAuliffe said.

Virginia Receives Increased Homeland Security Grant Funds : Augusta Free Press

[Augusta \(VA\) Free Press](#), March 20, 2014

Gov. Terry McAuliffe today announced that Virginia has received \$7.4 million in Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) funds for fiscal year 2014 from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a 15 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. These grants are provided to strengthen the commonwealth's ability to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks, major disasters and other emergencies.

In addition, both the Hampton Roads and National Capital regions will receive increased funding for fiscal year 2014 as part of the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI). The Hampton Roads region was identified as a high-threat, high-density urban area and will receive \$1 million in renewed

funding. The National Capital region will receive \$53 million in UASI funding, a 2.2 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. UASI grants are provided for law enforcement and terrorism prevention and typically include training and exercises, updates to current planning and procedures, and lifecycle replacement of equipment.

"This significant increase in federal homeland security grant funding will greatly improve Virginia's ability to keep our families, communities and economic assets safe," said Governor McAuliffe. "As home to some of the world's largest military installations and critical government infrastructure, Virginia is a strategic partner in national defense and homeland security. These funds are vital to us as we plan and prepare for known and unknown threats. We especially appreciate that the Hampton Roads region was added back in to the UASI program. I salute the hard work of those with Hampton Roads governments and organizations as well as state agencies that made the case and developed the documentation to gain this crucial funding for sustaining regional preparedness initiatives."

Virginia's proposal for the federal grants is developed with input from local and state governments, nonprofit organizations and others from throughout the commonwealth. The proposal identifies statewide and regional projects that will improve Virginia's capabilities to plan for and respond to manmade and natural emergencies. Funds will be distributed to localities on a regional basis.

Homeland Security And City Of San Antonio

By Mike W. Thomas

[San Antonio Business Journal](#), March 20, 2014

The City of San Antonio has received a \$1 million federal grant to expand and improve homeland security preparedness.

The funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency are part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Urban Areas Security Initiative. San Antonio was one of just three cities in Texas and 39 across the country to receive funding through the program this year.

"The Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) has a proven track record of success giving first responders the tools they need to respond to terrorist attacks and other disasters," says U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Texas. "... I am pleased to see the City of San Antonio receive this federal investment that will keep our community safer and support the men and women who are the first to arrive when we need them most."

San Antonio received UASI funding in Fiscal Year 2012 but not last year in fiscal year 2013, Cuellar notes. The UASI program provides \$587 million to address the unique planning, organization, equipment, training and exercise needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and assists them in building an enhanced and sustainable capacity to

prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to and recover from acts of terrorism.

Carper Encourages States To Prepare Applications For Preparedness Grants

[Homeland Security Today](#), March 20, 2014

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairman Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.) Wednesday highlighted the beginning of the application period for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) grants.

States seeking preparedness-related grants must submit their applications to FEMA no later than May 23, 2014. Final grant amounts will be determined by July 25, 2014.

"FEMA's Preparedness Grants are an important way that states and localities can build their homeland security capabilities," Carper said. "As last year's attack at the Boston Marathon and recent extreme weather events like Superstorm Sandy have shown us, you can never be too prepared. I encourage each applicant to review their needs, put together a plan, and apply for these lifesaving grants."

The SHSP is a series of grants that provide recipients with the funding to build and sustain homeland security capabilities through planning, organizational resources, equipment, training and exercises.

In addition to SHSP grants, FEMA offers a variety of other grants to state, local, tribal governments and nonprofits. They are:

- Homeland Security Grant Program;
- State Homeland Security Program;
- Urban Areas Security Initiative;
- Operation Stonegarden;
- Urban Area Security Initiative Nonprofit Security Grant Program;
- Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program;
- Intercity Passenger Rail (Amtrak) Program;
- Port Security Grant Program; and the
- Transit Security Grant Program

For more information on each grant and guidance for how to apply, visit: www.grants.gov or www.fema.gov/grants.

President Obama: U.S. Doing All It Can On Flight 370

By Jennifer Epstein

[Politico](#), March 20, 2014

President Barack Obama is confident that U.S. authorities are doing all they can to assist in the search for the missing Malaysian Airlines jet and says he understands the "uncertainty" that victims' families feel.

The NTSB and FBI are "absolutely" doing all they can, he said in response to a question from a reporter from KDFW in Dallas. One of the Americans believed to be aboard the

plane is Philip Wood, an IBM employee who grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"We want to send out our thoughts and prayers to all the families that have been affected but particularly our American families," Obama said in his first public comments about the missing plane. "I can only imagine what they're going through — all this uncertainty that's taken place."

Flight 370 has been missing since March 8. It was carrying 239 people when it left Kuala Lumpur bound for Beijing.

Obama: Missing Malaysian Jet A 'Top Priority'

By Kevin Johnson And Kim Hjelmgaard

[USA Today](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON – President Obama said Wednesday the hunt for the missing Malaysian airliner is a "top priority," as the FBI joined the investigation into the mystery.

Obama told KDFW-TV of Dallas that the U.S. and Malaysian governments will work closely together to find the plane, which disappeared March 8 while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. All 239 people on board are missing.

"We have put every resource that we have available at the disposal of the search process," Obama said. "There's been close cooperation with the Malaysian government ... anybody who typically deals with anything related to our aviation system is available."

The president added, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families – I want them to be assured that we consider this a top priority, and we're going to keep on working."

He said the NTSB will also be involved in the probe. The FBI is expected to begin analyzing hard drives from computers seized at the pilots' homes as soon as this week.

A federal law enforcement official said the material, including a flight simulator recovered from one of the pilot's homes, is likely to be shipped to the FBI's lab in Quantico, Va. The official is not authorized to speak publicly about the investigation and requested anonymity.

Since the plane's disappearance, the FBI and Justice Department had offered to assist the Malaysian government but until now had not been formally invited to join the inquiry as is required.

Attorney General Eric Holder said Wednesday that the two governments have been "in ongoing conversations about how we can help."

"We're working with authorities, but we don't have any theories (on the cause of the plane's disappearance)," Holder said Wednesday.

In Malaysia, investigators said Wednesday they are trying to restore files deleted last month from the home flight simulator of the pilot of a missing Malaysian plane, but the wait for answers was too much for some relatives who disrupted a news conference.

Malaysia's Defense Minister and Acting Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein cautioned reporters at a news conference that the deletion of the files of the pilot, Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah, may have nothing to do with the circumstances of the jet's disappearance 12 days ago.

Files containing records of simulations carried out on the program were deleted Feb. 3, Malaysian police chief Khalid Abu said. He said the files may have been deleted merely to free up memory space.

But investigators wanted to check the files for any signs of unusual flight paths of Flight 370, which appears to have veered hundreds of miles from its intended flight path after vanishing from civilian radar.

At least two relatives of passengers aboard the flight were forcibly removed Wednesday from the news conference at a hotel near Kuala Lumpur. Footage broadcast by the BBC showed a woman thought to be a Chinese relative of a missing passenger being knocked to the ground and then dragged away from journalists ahead of the daily news briefing by Malaysian officials.

The pair appeared to be trying to unfurl a banner expressing their dissatisfaction over the lack of progress in the investigation. Police escorted them out.

Of the 239 people aboard the plane that went missing March 8 on a night flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, more than 150 were Chinese nationals. Malaysian authorities have been especially sensitive to any criticism of the investigation.

"One can only imagine the anguish they (relatives) are going through," Hishammuddin said. "Malaysia is doing everything in its power to find MH370 and hopefully bring some degree of closure for those whose family members are missing."

Police are continuing to consider a number of different scenarios that would explain the plane's disappearance, including the possibility of hijacking, sabotage, terrorism or issues related to the mental health of the pilots or anyone else on board. They have asked for background checks from foreign agencies on all foreign passengers.

Hishammuddin said background checks have been received for all the foreigners except those from Ukraine and Russia. Those two countries had three passengers on the flight. He said none of the checks have turned up anything suspicious.

Still, the theories about what happened to the Boeing 777 plane, and where it or its wreckage may now be located, have stacked up even as investigators have been able to offer relatives few concrete facts about how it vanished.

Authorities from 26 countries have expanded the search-and-rescue mission to an unprecedentedly large area stretching from central Asia to the southern Indian Ocean.

But with each passing day, the resentment by relatives over the lack of progress is building.

"It's really too much. I don't know why it is taking so long for so many people to find the plane," Subaramaniam Gurusamy, 60, said in an interview with the Associated Press from his home on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. His 34-year-old son, Pushpanathan Subramaniam, was on the flight heading to Beijing for a work trip.

"He's the one son I have," Subaramaniam said.

Malaysia Turns To F.B.I. For Help In Plane Inquiry

By Chris Buckley And Michael S. Schmidt

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

SEPANG, Malaysia — The Malaysian authorities have asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation for help in recovering data that was deleted from a home flight simulator belonging to one of the pilots of the missing Malaysia Airlines jet, in the hope that it will provide some clue to what happened to the plane.

The expansion of the American role in the investigation came as governments struggled to narrow down the vast search zone for the plane, which stretches across two hemispheres, and as relatives of some of the 227 missing passengers angrily criticized the Malaysian government's handling of the so-far fruitless hunt.

Investigators have said the plane's extraordinary diversion from its intended course — it shifted from a northeastward path across the Gulf of Thailand to a westward one across the Malaysian Peninsula — was probably carried out by someone on the plane who had aviation experience. Attention has focused on the two pilots, Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah, 53, and his junior officer, Fariq Abdul Hamid, 27. The Malaysian police, who found that Mr. Zaharie had built a flight simulator in his home, said on Wednesday that some data was erased from the simulator on Feb. 3, more than a month before the ill-fated flight.

"The experts are looking at what are the logs, what has been cleared," Khalid Abu Bakar, inspector general of the Malaysian police, told reporters at a news conference in Sepang, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, the capital. He declined to comment further.

Because of evidence suggesting that whoever diverted the missing plane, a Boeing 777-200, knew how to disable the plane's communications systems and make course changes, the data recorded in Mr. Zaharie's flight simulator may shed light on whether he was involved, and may have rehearsed actions before the flight. But building and using flight simulators at home is a popular hobby among aviation enthusiasts, and the deletion of data from his simulator may have been routine housekeeping with no significance. Mr. Zaharie did not keep his simulator a secret: he posted a video on YouTube more than a year ago showing him sitting in front of it.

Hishammuddin Hussein, the Malaysian defense minister and acting transportation minister, emphasized that "the passengers, the pilots and the crew remain innocent until proven otherwise."

He said the authorities had received background-check information from the home countries of all the passengers on the plane except Ukraine and Russia. "So far, no information of significance on any passengers has been found," he said.

To speed its efforts, the F.B.I. will probably make copies of the simulator's hard drive and have its contents digitally relayed back to agents and analysts in the United States who specialize in retrieving deleted computer files. "Right now, it's the best chance we have of finding something," said a senior law enforcement official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the investigation. Unless the pilot used extremely sophisticated technology to erase files, the F.B.I. is likely to be able to retrieve them.

It was not clear whether the Malaysians have asked American law enforcement officials for help with any other parts of their inquiry. The Malaysians have kept American investigators at a distance since the plane vanished in the early hours of March 8, angering some lawmakers in Washington who believe that the F.B.I. should have been playing a larger role in the investigation from the beginning. A small team of F.B.I. agents in Malaysia has received briefings on the investigation, but has not been asked to help with the inquiry.

Despite this, American law enforcement officials and intelligence analysts in Washington checked the names of the passengers on the plane to determine whether any of them had known links to terrorists, but that yielded no connections. As part of the American efforts, F.B.I. agents interviewed family members of the passengers in the United States and Europe, and conducted link analysis — a computer-based investigative technique that tries to discern connections between individuals based on extensive government and airline databases — on the pilots and on two Iranian passengers who were traveling on stolen passports.

The 12 days since the plane, operating as Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 bound for Beijing from Kuala Lumpur, disappeared from air controllers' screens have been troubled by confusion that has compounded the anguish of family members waiting for news.

The frustrations felt by family members and friends of the missing Chinese passengers erupted before a briefing by Malaysian officials Wednesday in a hotel conference room in Sepang. As reporters waited for the news conference to start, several protesters who said they represented families of the passengers unfurled a banner that read: "We oppose the Malaysian government concealing the truth. Delaying time for saving lives."

"All our feelings are the same: we demand to know the truth," said Xu Dengwang, one of the protesters. "It's not about compensation, it's about the truth."

"We've waited, and waited, and waited, and Malaysia Airlines says kind words, but the Malaysian government hasn't told us anything," said Mr. Xu, a middle-aged man from Beijing who said a relative of his had been on Flight 370.

After a scuffle, the police eventually pulled down the banner and forced the protesters out of the room.

About two-thirds of the 227 passengers on the plane were Chinese citizens. Some of their family members have come to Malaysia, hoping for word that the plane has been found. Those hopes appear increasingly bleak, and the protesters said that until now they had been prevented from telling reporters about their mounting frustration with the Malaysian government's erratic response.

"We need to know the truth," said one member of the group, a middle-aged woman who declined to give her name or the name of her missing kin. "The Malaysian government is a bunch of cheats. All the governments of the world must join together to pressure the Malaysian government to give an explanation."

Mr. Hishammuddin, the government minister who has overseen the Malaysian search effort, said he would investigate the protest. "One can only imagine the anguish they are going through," he said in an emailed statement.

While investigators grapple with the minutiae of machines and people on the missing plane, searchers are confronted with sobering limits on their reach across huge areas of sea and land. The plane's whereabouts remain little more than a matter of educated guesswork, based on satellite signals and other data gleaned by analysts.

The United States has employed its constellation of spy satellites in the search since its earliest stages, and is now using the satellites' ability to capture high-resolution images to help narrow down the search area, a senior American military official said.

Officials are using imagery taken during the satellites' regular orbits, and have not yet instructed the American government's National Reconnaissance Office, which operates the satellites, to redirect any specific satellite to focus solely on the search, the American official said. The satellite imagery would be most useful in detecting any debris floating on the ocean; it would probably not spot an airliner in flight at cruising altitude. "The satellites are being used, but so far they haven't found anything," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the investigation.

On Monday, after consultations with the Malaysian government, the United States said it would soon withdraw a Navy destroyer, the Kidd, from the search effort and rely instead on two Navy surveillance aircraft — a P-3 Orion

based for now in Kuala Lumpur, and a newer, more advanced P-8 Poseidon, based in Perth, Australia.

Designed to hunt enemy submarines, the P-3 and P-8 aircraft are equipped with sophisticated electronics and advanced sensors that would be used to try to spot any debris from a possible crash. With the search now focusing on the southern Indian Ocean west of Australia, the aircraft can hunt in that area more quickly and efficiently than a surface ship, military officials said.

The senior military official said the Malaysians were now focusing more on the southernmost of the two possible regions where the airplane could be because of a lack of evidence that it had flown over land toward the northern region.

Malaysian officials said on Monday that the southern search would be coordinated by the Australian and Indonesia governments. On Wednesday, Australian organizers said they had narrowed down their search area by half, though it was still huge — an expanse of deep ocean the size of Italy.

John Young, general manager for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority's emergency response division, said the focus had been narrowed using new data analysis of the plane's likely fuel consumption.

The new area of focus in the Australian-led part of the search covers 89,000 square nautical miles, and is roughly 1,200 nautical miles southwest of Perth, Mr. Young said, adding that nothing had been found in the areas covered so far. The searchers have a good view of the water and have been able to spot marine life, "so we know we can make sightings, but there were no results relevant to the search," Mr. Young said.

Like other officials involved in the multinational search, Mr. Young stressed the sheer difficulty of finding the plane, let alone possible survivors, more than a week and a half after the jet disappeared.

"We still have grave fears for the safety of anyone that may have managed to escape the aircraft in the southern ocean," Mr. Young said. "It remains a big area. There is a lot of work to be done yet."

FBI Analyzing Flight Simulator Data In Malaysia

By Eric Tucker

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. official said Wednesday that the Malaysian government is seeking the FBI's help in analyzing any electronic files deleted last month from the home flight simulator of the pilot of the missing Malaysian plane.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to discuss the

ongoing investigation by name, said the FBI has been provided electronic data to analyze.

Malaysia's defense minister said earlier Wednesday that investigators were trying to restore files deleted last month from the home simulator used by the pilot, Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah, to see if they shed any light on the disappearance. Files containing records of simulations carried out on the program were deleted Feb. 3.

At a news conference Wednesday, Attorney General Eric Holder told reporters that "I don't think we have any theories" about what happened to the plane but said the FBI has been in touch with Malaysian investigators about providing any help that it can.

"We are in ongoing conversations about how we can help and we will make available whatever resources that we have, whatever expertise we have, that might be able to be used," Holder said.

Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 with 239 people aboard disappeared March 8 on a night flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

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U.S. Examines Pilot Simulator Data As Malaysia Plane Search Falters

By Tim Hether, A. Ananthakshmi And Mark Hosenball

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Australia Prime Minister Says Satellite May Have Spotted Malaysia Airliner Debris

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Australia's prime minister said Thursday that two objects possibly related to the missing Malaysia Airlines flight have been spotted on satellite imagery and an air force plane was diverted to the area to try to locate them.

The Orion aircraft was expected to arrive in the area Thursday afternoon, Prime Minister Tony Abbott told Parliament in Canberra. Three additional aircraft are expected to follow for a more intensive search, he said.

Abbott cautioned, however, that the task of locating these objects will be extremely difficult and "it may turn out that they are not related to the search for flight MH370."

Flight 370 disappeared March 8 on a night flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Malaysian authorities have not ruled out any possible explanations, but have said the evidence so far suggests the flight was deliberately turned back across

Malaysia to the Strait of Malacca, with its communications systems disabled. They are unsure what happened next and why.

Investigators have identified two giant arcs of territory spanning the possible positions of the plane about 7 1/2 hours after takeoff, based on its last faint signal to a satellite — an hourly "handshake" signal that continues even when communications are switched off. The arcs stretch up as far as Kazakhstan in central Asia and down deep into the southern Indian Ocean.

Previous reports of possible debris from a crash have not panned out.

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IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS **ENFORCEMENT**

More Than 100 People Found In House In Houston

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

HOUSTON — A house overflowing with more than 100 people presumed to be in the U.S. illegally was uncovered just outside Houston on Wednesday, a police spokesman said.

The suspected stash house was found during a search for a 24-year-old woman and her two children, a 7-year-old girl and a 5-year-old boy, that were reported missing by relatives late Tuesday after a man failed to meet them as planned at an undisclosed location on the city's north side, said John Cannon, a spokesman for the Houston Police Department. Many of the people in home that authorities said appeared to be part of a human smuggling operation were dressed only in undergarments and they were sitting in in filthy conditions and surrounded by trash bags full of old clothing, Cannon said.

When police opened the door to the home they found "a large, large group of people, some sitting on top of one another, very confined spaces," Cannon said. "They yell out the woman's name to see if she is in there, and she emerges with the two children. They're OK."

The single-family home, in southern Harris County, is about 1,500-square-feet, Cannon said. At first, officers saw only a mattress on the floor and a refrigerator in an exterior room. It was when they went further into the house that they found the people — 94 men, all in their undergarments and shoeless, 15 women and the woman with her two children — lying in filth in several small rooms, all with access to one bathroom and no hot water.

Many of the women said they had been in the house for three or four days, Cannon said. One woman said she had been there for 15 days. All of them said they were hungry, thirsty and tired.

"It was just filth, very squalid-like conditions inside. Trash bags with clothing piled as high as you can see," Cannon said. "They were very surprised at the numbers of people inside. Some were just sitting on top of one another because there was just no room."

Authorities said five men have been arrested.

Houston police have handed the investigation over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. ICE spokesman Greg Palmore said it has been five years since officials uncovered a house in the Houston area with this many people inside. In 2012, a house with 86 people was discovered, he said.

ICE took the people in the home into custody and they will be questioned and fed, Palmore said. The people were primarily from Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador, he said. Two of the people, a pregnant woman and a man, have been taken to a hospital for unknown treatment, he added. Although Palmore said it was too early to say whether this was part of a human trafficking operation, he said it appeared that way.

Houston sits about seven hours from the Mexican border, making it a popular route for immigrants, Palmore explained.

"Houston is significant for the highway corridors that make up Houston, I-45 and I-10. With those two traffic corridors you can pan out anywhere in the United States," Palmore said. "And it's very easy to assimilate into the communities here."

The home was found after Houston police were tipped off that the woman and children they were looking for may have been taken there. Cannon said police set up surveillance points outside the house early Wednesday and pulled over a car with two men inside for a routine traffic stop when they saw them leaving the driveway. Handguns and documents that suggested illegal activity were found in the car, leading police to detain the two men and enter the house, he said.

After the people were removed and a count began, three men attempted to flee on foot, Cannon said. Those men have also been detained and are suspected of illegal activity as well. In addition, police found two coops with hundreds of chickens on the property that are part of an investigation into illegal cock-fighting, he said.

Police have not identified the suspects.

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More Than 100 People Found In Suspected Stash House

By St. John Barned-smith, Dane Schiller, Dale Lezon
[Houston Chronicle](#), March 20, 2014

The phone call to police was a plea to help save a family held by smugglers. But when authorities raided the south Harris County home which they believed held the woman and children Wednesday, they found 110 people imprisoned in a packed, rancid "stash house" where smugglers had locked them away pending payment for their freedom.

A tipster had told authorities the night before that he was being extorted by smugglers, and feared for the safety of relatives from Central America. The tipster had said that a coyote drop of the mother, her 7-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son was supposed to have taken place Tuesday on Houston's north side, but it didn't happen and they were missing.

Police have not explained what led them to the Alameda School Road house, where they set up surveillance Wednesday morning. At 10 a.m., they stopped two men in a vehicle leaving the house. Three more suspected smugglers were arrested after they tried to flee, Houston Police Department spokesman John Cannon said.

But their biggest discovery came when authorities opened another door to the house, and encountered a "sea of people coming at the officers as they entered," Cannon said.

Federal agents, along with police, sheriff's deputies and constables, found them packed into the home, sitting on each others' laps, hungry, thirsty, and exhausted.

Dozens flooded out into the fresh air and sunlight from inside the house, which had a slumping roof and a faded "Keep Out" sign above its front door. It had been locked from the outside, and the windows were boarded from the inside, authorities said.

County records described the single-story house as being 1,284 square feet in size, though neighbors said an addition had been constructed.

Some of the occupants said they had been in the house for a few days, others more than two weeks.

"The smell and conditions were just awful," Cannon said, describing a scene of squalor: rooms littered with plastic trash bags and clothes, a single toilet, no hot water, and a terrible stench of unwashed humanity.

Smugglers had confiscated everyone's shoes to make it tougher for them to run away. Men were kept stripped to their underwear, according to authorities.

The occupants ranged in age from 5 to 47. The majority were men. Seventeen were juveniles.

"They just don't care. No decency for humans," said Ellea Johnson, a neighbor who lives across the street. "That's what got to me."

The raid marked the biggest discovery in the Houston region in at least seven years, and underscored the area's role as a hub for smuggling people into Texas and the rest of the United States, said Greg Palmore, a spokesman for Homeland Security Investigations.

The action comes on the eve of a hearing Thursday at Texas Southern University by the U.S. House Homeland Security Committee that is examining how to combat human trafficking in major U.S. cities.

"This case demonstrates the human tragedy that occurs as a result of our broken borders," said U.S. Rep. Mike McCaul, who represents part of Harris County and chairs the committee. "Last year over 100,000 people entered the United States illegally through Texas alone and the Department of Homeland Security has no plan to stop the flow."

Most of the people from the house were loaded onto buses. Authorities said they would be taken to a detention facility in north Houston, where they would be interviewed, fingerprinted and medically examined. The majority are likely to be deported.

A pregnant woman who had medical issues, but was not in labor, was taken to a hospital.

Several hours after police discovered the stash house, medical personnel wheeled a man out of the crowd on a gurney, an oxygen mask strapped to his face.

Exactly what was going on at the house remains under investigation, but smugglers typically use such operations as the final leg in a dangerous, covert journey to sneak people into the United States.

Many in the home were believed to be from Central American countries, including Honduras. That would mean that some of their treks started nearly 2,000 miles away and included first making it through Mexico, which has a record of being an especially brutal place for Central Americans traveling without immigration papers.

There are countless instances of people being robbed, raped and temporarily jailed long before they make it to Mexico's northern border. They must then cross into the United States, and then reach the relative anonymity of a city like Houston, where they can blend into the population.

Homeland Security's Palmore said the large number of immigrants in the house does not necessarily indicate more people are being pushed through Houston, but shows at least one group was bold enough to put so many people in one place.

The most recent large residential bust in the Houston area came in 2012, when 86 people were found in a house, Palmore said.

Ovidio Cisneros, who lives near the house that was raided Wednesday, said he never suspected a problem there.

"I've lived here for 30 years and I pass by there every single day," Cisneros said. "We never saw no traffic at all."

Carol Christian and Craig Hlavaty contributed to this report.

Authorities Rescue 108 People From Squalid Houston Stash House

By Paresh Dave

[Los Angeles Times](#), March 19, 2014

Houston police and federal immigration authorities rescued 108 people held against their will for several days in a squalid suspected stash house in south Houston, officials said Wednesday.

The 93 males and 15 females, including 17 children, came from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, authorities said. It was still being determined how they ended up locked in the small, single-story house with one bathroom, no hot water and very little food, officials told The Times.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which described the rescue as the region's largest such operation in at least five years, arrested five men on suspicion of running a smuggling ring, agency spokesman Gregory Palemore said. They had not yet been formally charged.

Police started watching the house about 10 a.m. Wednesday, Houston police spokesman John Cannon said. They were drawn there by a frantic mother who called police Tuesday evening, saying that suspected kidnappers had ordered her to pay a ransom for her 24-year-old daughter and her 7-year-old-girl and 5-year-old boy. When the kidnappers failed to show up for the scheduled exchange in north Houston, the woman called for help.

Cannon declined to say how police connected the tip to the house. The caller's three family members were among those found inside.

Two of the suspects were arrested as they attempted to drive away from the house Wednesday morning. Guns and "paper indicating illegal activity" were found in the car, Cannon said, which gave officers reason to search the residence.

"They saw dozens and dozens of people in a very tight residence, cramped in like you would normally see animals," Cannon said. "They were hungry and tired."

The three other suspects were detained as they tried to run away. Cannon described them as core leaders who appeared to have been staying in a more well-kept bedroom with a refrigerator, a mattress on the floor and weapons.

The children and adults had been staying in a cordoned area of the approximately 2,200-square foot house, with boarded windows and two dead-bolted doors that opened only from the outside. The single toilet didn't always flush properly, Cannon said.

Video shot from news helicopters after the raid shows men, women and children sitting in small groups on the

driveway of the ramshackle property as law enforcement officers mill about.

One woman said she had been stuck inside for 15 days and many others said they had been there since the weekend, Cannon said. A pregnant woman who felt ill was hospitalized. Another individual was also taken to a hospital for an unknown condition, Palmore said.

Authorities plan to interview, fingerprint, medically examine and provide a meal to the people found at the home. They were being held at an immigration detention facility and could face deportation.

"The scope of how long it has been operating will be investigated by ICE because of the magnitude of this," Cannon said. "The officers were very surprised by the conditions and the number of people inside."

Outside the house, officers found hundreds of chickens that may have been for cock-fighting, Cannon said.

The house, on Alameda School Road, is one of only a few in the mostly industrial area near the intersection of the Sam Houston Tollway and the South Freeway.

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More Than 100 People Found In Suspected Stash House

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 19, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

More Than 100 Immigrants Found At Suspected Stash House In Texas

By Suzanne Presto And Dana Ford

[CNN](#), March 19, 2014

(CNN) – Police in Houston rescued more than 100 immigrants Wednesday from a suspected stash house where they were being held against their will.

A total of 94 men and 15 women, including children, were discovered inside the one-story, roughly 1,500 square-foot home, according to police spokesman John Cannon.

A pregnant woman was taken to a hospital for medical attention, but most of the others appeared healthy.

"No one looked to be seriously injured inside the home. They were very hungry and thirsty, and our officers gave them things to eat and provided water. They said they were tired and hungry," Cannon said.

Five people were arrested.

Charges against them are pending, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman Greg Palmore, who said that 95 men and 15 women were rescued.

It was not immediately clear why Palmore and the police spokesman reported different numbers.

The immigrants – from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico – are in ICE custody, Palmore said. They range in age from 5 to 47.

"I've been here over five years and this is the largest number of people we've encountered at one residence," Palmore said.

'Squalid conditions'

According to Cannon, authorities were tipped off to the case Tuesday night when police were contacted by family members of a missing 24-year-old woman.

They were supposed to meet a suspect holding the woman and two children – a 7-year-old girl and a 5-year-old boy – for ransom.

When the suspect did not show to make the exchange, the family notified police.

The spokesman declined to say how or why authorities then zeroed in on a house in south Harris County, Texas. But police set up surveillance there, and when a vehicle left the residence, a patrol car pulled it over on a traffic stop.

Officers found weapons inside the car, as well as papers indicating criminal activity, Cannon said. Two suspects were detained.

Police then entered the home.

One room, where the suspect or suspects are believed to have stayed, had a mattress, fridge and weapons, Cannon said.

"The rest of the house was cordoned off, and it's where the individuals held against their will were staying – in squalid conditions. There was one bathroom. It was filthy," the spokesman added. "The windows were boarded with plywood, and the doors were dead bolted. You can only enter from outside."

Most of those rescued said they had been at the house for two to four days, but one woman said she had been there 15 days.

Three additional suspects were caught trying to flee the residence, bringing the number of people detained to five.

CNN's Gustavo Valdes contributed to this report.

More Than 100 People Found In Texas Human Smuggling Raid

By Andrea Lorenz

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

2 Children Among More Than 100 People Held Hostage In Houston Stash House

[KHOU-TV Houston](#), March 20, 2014

HOUSTON—More than 100 suspected illegal immigrants were found living in deplorable conditions in a south Houston stash house Wednesday, police said.

The men, women and children were held against their will by smugglers or coyotes.

One officer described the inside of the home in the 14700 block of Almeda School Road as “awful.”

“There is no hot water in the house. There is a toilet that partially works—one bathroom for in excess of 100 people,” said HPD spokesman John Cannon.

Police said there was human waste all over the house.

The victims included a 24-year-old pregnant woman and her two children, ages 5 and 7.

“The children were scared,” said Noland Luke, a neighbor. “They brought them out, they crying and carrying on. Feel sorry for them.”

The woman’s mother called authorities after a coyote, who was paid to bring them across the border from Mexico, refused to release the immigrants until he got more money.

Police investigated her complaint and discovered one of the largest stash houses they’ve ever seen.

Deadbolt locks on the inside doors kept the victims from being able to leave the one-story home.

The hostages – 94 adult males, 14 adult females and the two children—will be turned over to the custody of ICE.

Five smugglers were arrested by Houston police.

There were about 250 chickens living outside the home.

Still, neighbors said they never suspected anything.

“I only see them going in and out. That’s it,” said Ellea Johnson. “I never had an idea it was like this.”

Johnson was especially disturbed about the children.

“These kids aren’t going to forget this, they’re not,” She said. “They need counseling for this. They’re young, elementary school children. It’s going to stick with them.”

Paying Price, 16 Years Later, For An Illegal Entry

By John Eligon And Damien Cave

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The cellblock intercom awoke Josue Noe Sandoval-Perez at 1 o’clock on a frigid January morning at a detention center in northwest Missouri: Get your things, get ready to go. Immigration officials were preparing to whisk him away.

A day earlier the government denied an appeal of his deportation order, but no one told his family, nor was he allowed to call.

So while Mr. Sandoval-Perez, 41, an illegal immigrant with a previous deportation on his record, was beginning his journey back to his native Mexico, his family was clinging to hope at a rally in a park here. Holding signs, they argued that he had been in the country for 16 years, had no criminal

record, paid taxes and was the primary breadwinner for his children — one an American citizen, the other an immigrant who is here legally.

He was dropped off that night in Matamoros, a violence-ridden Mexican border town. When he called his wife, Josefina Aguilar, from outside a bus station to tell her what happened, gunshots could be heard.

“I was just crying a lot, like my world was over,” Ms. Aguilar, 40, recalled.

Mr. Sandoval-Perez’s case — as described by him, his family and court documents — previews the difficulties President Obama will face in a review he ordered last week, asking the Homeland Security secretary, Jeh Johnson, to come up with a more “humane” deportation policy.

Like Mr. Sandoval-Perez, many immigrants here illegally might qualify for protection from deportation if strong ties to family and community and steady work records were taken into account, but they also have past immigration violations that could count heavily against them.

The review comes too late to help Mr. Sandoval-Perez. But his case was among dozens that immigrant advocates presented to the White House last Friday as an example of how Mr. Obama’s enforcement policies had torn apart generally law-abiding families, separating breadwinning parents from children who have known no other country but the United States.

“Josue is a perfect example of a case that they should have exercised prosecutorial discretion on,” said Richard Morales, the detention prevention coordinator at the PICO National Network, an organization of faith-based community groups. “We welcome the news from the president, but we need to see details.”

In an interview at an apartment that he shares with his sister-in-law in Mexico City, Mr. Sandoval-Perez was more pointed about what he wanted from Mr. Obama.

“He has the power to end this discrimination, to change this,” said Mr. Sandoval-Perez, holding a blue plastic folder with all his deportation documents. “Families have to stop being separated.”

Immigration officials declined to comment on the specifics of their decision not to grant Mr. Sandoval-Perez leniency. A spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement said in a statement that the agency’s deportation priorities included “convicted criminals, immigration fugitives and those apprehended at the border while attempting to unlawfully enter the United States.”

She added that the agency had begun to take a hard look at whether it could further align its enforcement policies with the “goal of sound law enforcement practice that prioritizes public safety,” which could mean more leniency for some immigrants with prior deportations.

A study released on Tuesday by the Pew Research Center found that federal court convictions of immigrants who

returned illegally after deportation — like Mr. Sandoval-Perez — had increased 28-fold over the past two decades, from 690 in 1992 to 19,463 in 2012. That rise accounts for nearly half the growth of all federal convictions over that time span, the report said.

But for now, as immigration overhaul efforts have stalled in Congress, the Obama administration has found itself having to adjudicate cases that present compelling arguments for and against deportation.

Mr. Sandoval-Perez, whose shaved head and hulking frame appeared intimidating until he cried at every mention of his daughter, acknowledged that he first tried to cross the border illegally with a green card that belonged to someone else in October 1998.

But he barely set foot into the country then. American officials stopped him at the border entrance to El Paso and did an expedited removal, which is legally a deportation. Two days later, he successfully crossed, meeting his wife and infant son, Erik, who had also entered illegally a few days earlier.

Holding Mr. Sandoval-Perez's previous deportation against him violates the spirit of the system, argued David Leopold, a Cleveland-based immigration lawyer, because the guideline is intended to target "somebody who serially re-enters the country, who doesn't have any ties to the United States."

"They need to use their common sense," Mr. Leopold said of immigration officials.

If the immigration bill that passed the United States Senate last year were law, Mr. Leopold said, Mr. Sandoval-Perez could have been eligible for amnesty.

But Jessica M. Vaughan, director of policy studies for the Center for Immigration Studies, a group that advocates less immigration and opposes the Senate bill, said that Mr. Sandoval-Perez's case bolstered the argument for focusing on tougher immigration enforcement.

"To me it shows the importance of having other programs in place that deter illegal settlement so that fewer people are able to stay here for that long a period of time and build a life here before being ordered removed," Ms. Vaughan said.

Mr. Sandoval-Perez's son, Erik, now 17, has a legal deportation reprieve under a 2012 Obama administration program. Erik, a high school junior, avidly plays the video game Call of Duty, fixes cars (which he learned from his father) and works at a clothing store. Mr. Sandoval-Perez's daughter, Nayelly, 12, who was born in the United States, is a blossoming basketball star who learned the game from her father.

Both fought back tears as they recently spoke about their father, in the white trailer decorated with images of Jesus and Our Lady of Guadalupe where they live on the eastern edge of Kansas City. Nayelly recalled playing a

basketball game the night she found out her father had been deported.

"Every time I would get the ball, I couldn't even dribble," she said. "I couldn't even, like, make a shot."

Mr. Sandoval-Perez and his wife say they came to the United States because they could not make a living wage in Mexico. They settled in Kansas City, where Mr. Sandoval-Perez worked in cabinet factories and, most recently, at a scrap yard. Last April, he said, he took coins from some of the cars in the scrap yard to a machine at a grocery store that converts change into bills. The machine jammed, police officers approached him and asked him for identification and where he worked. He told them everything, he said. They did not take any action against him.

But in January, officers showed up at the scrap yard and arrested him on a misdemeanor theft charge for using damaged currency in the machine.

Mr. Sandoval-Perez was one of several people arrested after an investigation by the department's fraud unit, a spokesman for the Kansas City Police Department said. Mr. Sandoval-Perez had several pieces of identification with different names on them, the spokesman said, so they called immigration officials to verify his identity, which led to his being placed on a hold.

Mr. Sandoval-Perez denied that he had multiple identifications and described the arrest as "discriminatory."

After about a week in the city's custody during which he did not have access to a shower, he was sent to an immigration detention facility about an hour north of Kansas City. On the outside, Communities Creating Opportunity, a faith-based community advocacy organization aligned with PICO, rallied members of the local clergy, got Representative Emanuel Cleaver II, Democrat of Missouri, to write a letter in support of Mr. Sandoval-Perez's release and got a lawyer to file for a stay of deportation.

Inside, Mr. Sandoval-Perez believed he would soon be released. But, he said, in the early hours of Jan. 31 — after the stay was denied, but before any of his supporters were notified — he was awakened by the message on the intercom in his immigration cell. Immigration officials said he was awakened early to prepare for his deportation but was allowed to return to sleep before being transported.

The night before, he said, the authorities pressured him to sign a final deportation document, but did not give him a copy. He initially refused and said he wanted to talk to his lawyer, but the officers told him not to worry about it. "Sign first," he recalled their saying, "then you can talk to your lawyer."

After about 10 hours in a holding area, he was flown with about 40 others to Brownsville, Tex., he said.

The authorities separated him from the group. He was sent across into Matamoros, after the other deportees, with just a brown paper bag holding his meager belongings — his

wallet, a belt, his wedding ring and his cellphone, dead from days without a charge.

John Eligon reported from Kansas City, and Damien Cave from Mexico City. Julia Preston contributed reporting from New York.

Charges Reduced, Immigrant Hopes To Stay In US

By Michael Melia, Associated Press

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) – An Ecuadorean immigrant facing possible deportation said Wednesday he hopes to be allowed to stay in the United States after a court removed a felony conviction stemming from a clash with a now-disgraced Connecticut police officer.

Edgar Marin, 32, was allowed to plead guilty on Monday to reduced charges related to his encounter with Officer Dennis Spaulding, who was among four East Haven officers arrested in a scandal over police abuse of Latinos.

Marin, a legal U.S. resident, struck a plea agreement in 2011 that led to his conviction on a charge of assaulting an officer. He was sentenced to two years' probation and then, in January, U.S. immigration agents detained him and moved to return him to Ecuador on grounds that he was a convicted felon.

"They never told me this was going to be a consequence," said Marin, who was released on bond from detention last week.

In an effort to prevent deportation, Marin's lawyers said the charges should be reduced, arguing that Spaulding has been discredited by his criminal conviction. Defense lawyer David Forsythe said prosecutors cooperated with the request. On Monday, Marin was allowed to plead guilty to the misdemeanor charge of interference with an officer.

Prosecutors did not respond to requests for comment.

Marin was arrested in June 2011 as police tried to tow his car following an accident. Marin said Spaulding used racially charged language as he blocked Marin from getting tools out of the car. Marin said he tried to stop the car from being towed, Spaulding pushed him and broke his wrist, and it was then that Marin pushed Spaulding. But an attorney for Spaulding said witnesses backed up his account that Marin was the aggressor.

Spaulding, who was arrested by the FBI in January 2012, was sentenced in January to five years in prison for conspiring to violate the constitutional rights of Hispanics, making false arrests and using unreasonable force. Marin was not among those to testify against him at trial.

Frank Riccio, an attorney for Spaulding, said the episode reflected a history of bad blood between his client and the Marin family, including a cousin who testified against Spaulding. Riccio said he understands that a case is

weakened when a key witness is convicted of a crime but he said Spaulding would not agree that he was discredited.

Marin, who moved to the U.S. from Ecuador 14 years ago, said that during his six-week detention his 6-year-old son was told that he was away working because he did not want him to know he was behind bars.

His immigration lawyer, Yale Law School student Elliot Friedman, said he hopes deportation proceedings will be stopped at his next hearing on May 6.

"It is morally and legally incorrect for Edgar to be in this position and threatened with deportation," Friedman said.

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Anti-deportation Activists To Hold Rally In East Haven

By Evan Lips

[New Haven \(CT\) Register](#), March 19, 2014

EAST HAVEN >> A dozen activists took to the steps of Town Hall Wednesday evening, braving the cold to speak out against a perceived lack of immigration reform, a demonstration sparked by the threat of deportation currently being experienced by one of their own.

Edgar Javier Marin, a New Haven resident and member of Unidad Latina en Accion, was released last week after spending six weeks being detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in response to a June 2011 incident in which he allegedly scrapped with East Haven police as they tried to tow his partner's car from an accident scene.

Asked why his group elected to demonstrate in front of Town Hall and not outside ICE's Court Street office in New Haven, ULA chief organizer John Lugo said it is intended "to be a message to the mayor of East Haven, he has not apologized to the community."

Mayor Joseph Maturo Jr. declined to comment when reached through his spokesman, Assistant Director of Administration and Management Frank Gentileco.

"Basically they're pretending that these issues never happened here," Lugo added, referring to the U.S. Department of Justice investigation into allegations of civil rights violations by the police. "The actions of the police affected hundreds of people."

In an earlier press release, ULA claimed the incident between Marin and police only occurred as a result of "being harassed and brutalized by (former) East Haven Police Officer Dennis Spaulding during a pattern of abuse that later landed Spaulding in federal prison."

Spaulding is one of four officers convicted in connection with a wide-ranging U.S. Department of Justice investigation following allegations of civil rights abuses.

Out of the four, two officers entered guilty pleas in exchange for reduced charges. Spaulding and former police Officer David Cari, however, took their cases to trial.

Both cases resulted in convictions; Cari was sentenced to serve 30 months in prison while Spaulding received a five-year sentence. According to his attorney, Frank Riccio, Spaulding is due to report to the Federal Bureau of Prisons early next month.

Marin's supporters believe his detention was likely related to his activism for immigration rights, including his complaining to the FBI about Spaulding. Marin's cousin, Moises Marin, made a statement against Spaulding during Spaulding's sentencing.

His altercation with Spaulding features conflicting accounts, as ULA has claimed Spaulding acted as the aggressor while Spaulding's police report and multiple eyewitnesses note that Marin was the initiator.

Marin, who possesses a green card, appeared in Hartford Immigration Court earlier Wednesday. He was released from ICE detention on March 12 after paying a \$7,000 bond, according to Fountain's press release.

Following the incident in 2011, Marin pleaded guilty to assaulting a police officer in exchange for no jail time. The charge is classified as a felony and carries a penalty of deportation.

Herman Zuniga, president of Community Immigrants of East Haven, said he accompanied Marin to Hartford and added that a federal judge allowed him to change his original plea and plead guilty to a misdemeanor.

"Edgar (Marin) got arrested by a corrupt, human rights violating police officer," Lugo said. "It's time for this community to get together and stand behind him."

Marin, originally from Ecuador, was one of the dozen who spoke from a megaphone at Wednesday's rally. Speaking in Spanish, Marin said he decided to attend the rally to try and convince President Barack Obama to stop deporting people.

"When I was locked up I met many people with families," he said through ULA member Megan Fountain about his time under ICE detention. "Everyone who comes to this country come with a dream, but that dream can sometime turn into a nightmare."

While Marin's felony conviction was lowered to a misdemeanor, Zuniga said he still has to persuade a judge to stop deportation proceedings. Marin's attorney, Yale University Law School student Elliot Friedman, said it is "gratifying to see Edgar (Marin) home today with his family," but added the threat of deportation that still hangs over his client's head "is both legally and morally incorrect."

Friedman said he expects Marin's case to conclude on or before May 6.

Marin's situation was not the only topic at Wednesday's demonstration.

ULA also addressed the potential deportation of New Haven resident Jose Luis Piscil, "an undocumented father who has lived with his wife and children in New Haven for more than six years and has no significant criminal record," according to an earlier press release.

"Mr. Piscil was detained through the flawed Secure Communities program when he was arrested for two minor charges that were later dismissed."

The release also notes that Latino leaders last week met with Obama and "presented him with 68 deportation cases, including Mr. Piscil's case, requesting that Obama take administrative action to end Secure Communities and extend Deferred Action to people like Mr. Piscil, just as he did for undocumented youth."

Lugo accused Obama of "putting deportation on steroids in an attempt to win Republican support for immigration reform."

"While he drags his feet on executive action, our neighbor could be ordered deported tomorrow," Lugo added in a statement.

At the rally Lugo stood by that statement.

"This is a call for Connecticut's Congressional delegation to reach out to President Obama because these deportations are affecting so many families," he said.

Mexican Immigrant Who Sought Sanctuary In Chicago Church Re-enters U.S.

[Reuters](#), March 18, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Elgin Lawmaker Resigns Days After Search Warrants

By Ray Long And Maura Zurick, Clout Street

[Chicago Tribune](#), March 19, 2014

A Democratic state lawmaker from Elgin resigned Wednesday, less than a week after federal agents executed search warrants at his home and district office.

Rep. Keith Farnham issued a statement, saying he has been "battling serious health issues for a number of years" and they will require his full attention in the "coming months."

In a letter to Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, Farnham said the resignation would be "effective immediately." Farnham was unopposed in Tuesday's primary election and Democratic leaders will pick a replacement for the Nov. 4 general election.

Farnham, who been in the Illinois House since 2009, could not be reached for comment. He did not reference the search warrants in his communications with the speaker and the Secretary of State's office, nor did not mention them in his news release.

Last Thursday, agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations executed the search warrants. Officials have not disclosed what authorities were looking for, saying the investigation is ongoing.

Democratic Lawmaker Resigns, Cites Health Reasons

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) – A state lawmaker whose home and office were the targets of federal search warrants last week resigned Wednesday, saying he has to devote his attention to “battling serious health issues.”

Rep. Keith Farnham, a Democrat from Elgin, announced his resignation in a one-sentence letter to House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago.

Farnham, a legislator since 2009, did not mention the search warrants executed March 13 by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations in a prepared statement that accompanied his letter.

“I have been battling serious health issues for a number of years and the coming months will require my full attention,” Farnham said. “The right thing to do for the people of the 43rd District is to make sure they have a dedicated, qualified and full-time advocate.”

Farnham did not respond to a phone message left Wednesday afternoon.

Gail Montenegro, a spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said no arrests have been made, but would not comment further other than to reiterate that the investigation is ongoing. The agency has not disclosed the reason behind the probe that led to the searches of Farnham's home and district office. His Springfield office was not searched, officials said.

The statement said Farnham's resignation takes effect immediately and that he will remove his name from the November ballot. He was unopposed in Tuesday's Democratic primary.

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Elgin Dem Farnham Resigns In Wake Of Federal Investigation

By Janelle Walker

[Elgin \(IL\) Courier News](#), March 20, 2014

ELGIN — State Rep. Keith Farnham, under fire after having his home and district office searched by federal Homeland Security investigators, submitted his resignation Wednesday from the Illinois House.

In a one-sentence letter sent to House Speaker Michael Madigan and Secretary of State Jesse White, the three-term

Elgin Democrat offered no explanation for why he was immediately stepping down from the House.

“This is to notify you that, effectively immediately, I hereby resign my position as representative in the General Assembly for the 43rd Representative District of the state of Illinois,” his letter stated.

However, in a statement obtained by CapitolFax blog, Farnham said, “It is with great regret today that I announce my resignation from the office of state representative, effective immediately.

“I have been battling serious health issues for a number of years, and the coming months will require my full attention. The right thing to do for the people of the 43rd District is to make sure they have a dedicated, qualified and full-time advocate in our communities and in the State Capitol to represent their needs and concerns every day without distraction or interruption. They deserve nothing less.”

According to CapitolFax blog, Farnham will withdraw as a nominee for state representative in the November election as soon as is legally allowed.

Farnham appeared on the Tuesday primary ballot and was unopposed. No Republicans had filed for the position.

Last Friday, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations unit executed search warrants at Farnham's home and district office, but the agency has not indicated whether anything was taken. Farnham has not been charged with any wrongdoing.

Farnham has not made any public statement about the federal investigation of which he is a part, referring questions to a criminal defense lawyer, Timothy Mahoney, who has declined comment.

He was not at his Springfield office Wednesday as the General Assembly reconvened following Tuesday's elections. No one answered a knock on his door in Elgin Wednesday evening.

State Sen. Mike Noland (D-Elgin), Farnham's state senator, told the Chicago Sun-Times Tuesday that constituents in the Elgin area are “bewildered” by the turn of events involving the now-former House member.

“I learned of Representative Farnham's resignation today with great disappointment. Whatever difficulties Keith is battling, I can only hope he gets the help he needs in the days and months ahead.”

Noland said looks forward to working with whoever replaces Farnham.

Farnham was a popular legislator who was first elected a state representative in 2008.

Farnham is a U.S. Navy veteran and business owner. His committee assignments in the House included Executive, Economic Development (chairperson), Public Utilities, State Government Administration, Veterans' Affairs (vice-chairperson), Special Subcommittee, Tax Policy and Other Taxes Subcommittee.

Replacements

Meanwhile, both political parties were looking into what will happen next with the seat.

"As voters we need to keep our elected officials accountable, and there are already three Republicans interested in running for his seat," said East Dundee Trustee Allen Skillicorn.

He declined to name those contenders.

"I'll just say we do have good candidates that are interested," he said.

Former Republican state Rep. Ruth Munson of Elgin, whom Farnham defeated in 2008, said she does not intend to run for the seat again.

Kane County Republicans could slate one candidate for the November election.

Kane County Democrats have 30 days to name a replacement for Farnham's seat, party chairman Mark Guethle said Wednesday afternoon.

"We have 30 days to fill the seat. We will get on it ... to find someone to represent the district, who lives and works there and who knows the area well. We will have someone," Guethle said.

It is his understanding that Farnham's resignation also removes him from the November ballot, Guethle said.

"He resigned everything, so ... it is up to the Democrats. The caucus will get together to represent the district," he added.

Guethle said he began investigating the process to replace Farnham after rumors of his pending resignation popped up Tuesday.

It is the first time in his memory that the Kane County Democrats have had to find a replacement for a state lawmaker, Guethle said.

"We will probably do some talking over the phone" to discuss potential replacements, he said. "We will figure it out. There are good people in Elgin, there are Democrats interested in serving the district. There will be someone good to work hard and represent the district and its needs."

Ratcliffe: Undocumented Immigrants Would 'Self Deport' If Jail Time Was On The Table

By Nick Swartsell

[Dallas Morning News](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON- John Ratcliffe, Rep. Ralph Hall's challenger in the Republican primary runoff, told the Washington Post today that one way to secure America's borders is by putting undocumented immigrants in jail instead of simply removing them from the country.

Ratcliffe said that under current laws, being in the country without documentation leads only to deportation. If undocumented immigrants faced jail time, however, he said many would leave of their own accord.

"If you made it a crime to be unlawfully present in the United States, you would have people who would effectively self-deport, if the consequences of being identified and apprehended were to be incarcerated rather than sent across an imaginary line," Ratcliffe told the Post. "I think that would contribute to our ability to deal with the problem."

Ratcliffe's campaign has touted to his experience with immigration issues. During his time as U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Texas from 2007-2008, he worked on a case involving undocumented immigrants at a Pilgrim's Pride poultry processing facility in Mount Pleasant. A raid of that plant led to the arrest and conviction of 38 immigrants who were using fraudulently-obtained social security numbers to work in the United States.

Immigrant Advocates Handed A Victory

By Maria Sacchetti

[Bellingham \(WA\) Herald](#), March 19, 2014

Seeking to curb deportations in Massachusetts, a legislative committee on Wednesday approved a bill that would bar state and local law enforcement from holding all but the most serious criminals so that federal immigration agents can take them into custody.

The Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security voted to advance the legislation known as the Trust Act by Wednesday's legislative deadline, handing a small but important victory to advocates for immigrants. The bill would impose the first restrictions on federal immigration officials since they dramatically expanded the controversial Secure Communities program in Massachusetts two years ago over the objections of Governor Deval Patrick.

"It is truly a great victory," said the bill's sponsor, state Senator James Eldridge, Democrat of Acton. "It's a recognition that if our federal government is not going to take action on immigration reform, then at the state level we need to take action."

Though still evolving, the bill sets the stage for a new clash in a state that has remained divided in recent years over hot-button issues such as in-state tuition or driver's licenses for people here illegally. (A committee mulling driver's licenses extended its voting deadline Wednesday to May 15.)

Under federal law, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, can ask state and local police to hold immigrants for an additional 48 hours after they have made bail, or been ordered released, so that deportation officers can pick them up. The proposed Trust Act would authorize police to honor the holds only for adult immigrants with criminal convictions who have served at least five years in prison. Others would be released.

The proposed bill follows similar laws passed last year in California and Connecticut under the same name.

Advocates say cities such as Newark refuse to hold immigrants at all.

Critics say the legislation violates the spirit of cooperation among law enforcement agencies and could lead to the release of serious criminals who have not served the required five years in prison.

"The only people that this benefits are the criminals who are going to be able to return to the streets," said Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies for the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington-based organization that favors tougher controls on immigration. "That's a very high standard for someone to have served five years."

She said an immigrant released for a lesser offense in Providence went on to rape a woman in 2008. And in Brockton, an Ecuadoran immigrant released after multiple arrests killed a woman and her son in 2011.

But Laura Rotolo, staff counsel with the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, said nothing in the bill prevents ICE agents from picking up immigrants on their own. And now that Secure Communities is activated statewide, she said, federal immigration agents already know where they are.

She also said that no immigrant would be released without first getting permission from a judge or magistrate, who would grant the detainee bail based on their dangerousness and flight risks.

"This is just an extra hold for ICE's purpose," she said. "It's a hold so that ICE can come and get them."

ICE spokesman Daniel Modricker said the agency does not comment on pending legislation, and the governor's office did not respond to a request for comment.

The Massachusetts Republican Party also declined to comment, but some members worry that the measure may undermine the Secure Communities program supported by leading GOP contender for governor, Charlie Baker.

"Charlie supports the Obama administration's Secure Communities program and believes law enforcement officials should have the tools and information necessary to keep our communities safe," spokesman Tim Buckley said in an e-mail.

Though immigration holds have existed for years, the issue gathered new urgency in May 2012 when ICE announced it would expand the Secure Communities program from Boston to the rest of the state, dramatically increasing its reach in the Commonwealth.

The computer-based program allows ICE to automatically screen the fingerprints of everyone arrested by state and local police to find immigrants, particularly criminals who have violated civil immigration laws.

Critics say more than half of those deported had never been convicted of a crime, and many were stopped for traffic violations or other minor offenses.

Since the expansion, the ratio has remained steady. As of November, federal records show, 51 percent of the 1,244

people deported from Massachusetts through the program since 2008 have not had a criminal record.

State Senator James Timilty, cochairman of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security, said no one opposed the bill at a public hearing this year. But many families spoke in favor of it, saying police had turned over their loved ones to ICE for deportation for minor violations such as speeding.

Others said the cooperation between police and federal immigration agents made immigrants afraid to call the police.

"I just thought that was a tragic occurrence in many respects, and maybe a very expensive response to a minor infraction," Timilty said in a phone interview. "They made some very compelling testimony at the hearing."

Timilty, a Democrat from Walpole, said the bill passed 8-0; eight additional committee members either abstained or did not vote. The panel has one vacancy.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

Border Patrol Chief: Agents Unfairly Criticized

By Astrid Galvan

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

PHOENIX (AP) — The chief of the U.S. Border Patrol defended his agency Wednesday against criticism that agents are too aggressive in using deadly force, telling the audience at a conference that he takes the issue very seriously.

Chief Michael Fisher said there's been a mischaracterization that his employees "indiscriminately" open fire on immigrants.

Fisher, who spoke at the annual Border Security Expo in Phoenix, spent the majority of his half-hour talk giving details of the metrics the organization uses to track border security. But he devoted the final few minutes of his speech to address the controversy over the use of force.

"If you are like me, there's nothing more terrifying than fighting for your life when you're alone with no communication, and the thought for a split second that you may never get home at the end of that shift to see your wife and son again," Fisher said. "The only thing that is equal to the ripple of fear is thinking of having to use deadly force against another human being."

Immigrant-rights groups say that Border Patrol agents are trigger-happy in responding to people who throw rocks at them along the border with Mexico. Authorities say that often people throw rocks to distract agents from smugglers sneaking drugs into the U.S.

In a directive issued earlier this month, Fisher reiterated that agents shouldn't fire their weapons unless absolutely necessary. The "level of force applied must reflect the totality of the circumstances surrounding each situation," he said.

Fisher has said that agents have been assaulted with rocks more than 1,700 times since 2010. Agents have used deadly force in 43 of those times, resulting in 10 deaths.

Fisher said that the use of a force is a difficult topic but there are standards and policies that address it.

"We want the independent investigators to come and to assess whether that agent exercised good judgment in the application of that force," he said.

Fisher said he was proud of the work his agents do.

He also delved into figures that show the recidivism rate for illegal border crossings has significantly decreased in the last decade. That rate dropped from a 28 to 39 percent between 2006 and 2009 to about 10 percent now, Fisher said.

Agents made 420,789 apprehensions in the 2013 fiscal year that ended in September. That's a 16 percent increase from the prior year but still a deep decrease from levels in 2008.

More than 98 percent of those arrests were made on the Southwest border, particularly in Texas. Officials have said the increase is caused by an influx of migrants from Central America who have been arrested in south Texas.

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Border Security Expo Showcases High-tech Wares

By Brian Skoloff

[WJBK-TV Detroit](#), March 20, 2014

PHOENIX (AP) – A border security convention opened in Phoenix with speeches from top government officials and exhibits of high-tech wares including drones, bulletproof vehicles, shock-proof clothing and mobile surveillance systems.

The eighth annual Border Security Expo will feature a keynote address Wednesday from U.S. Border Patrol Chief Michael Fisher, whose agency has been loudly criticized for its use-of-force policies and a lack of transparency.

Along with panel discussions about port of entry operations and sharing intelligence, the expo features exhibitors displaying technology that they hope to sell to law enforcement agencies as they beef up border security.

The event's organizers say its aim is to bring law enforcement and policymakers together with industry leaders to discuss technological advances and share ideas about border security.

Alejandro Mayorkas, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, told a crowd Tuesday he hopes to work toward more transparency within the agency amid outcry from critics about lack of oversight.

Mayorkas said the agency needs to strengthen its partnerships with the private sector, noting "a tremendous public thirst" for greater knowledge of the agency's operations and mission.

"Criticism drives a more responsible and better government," he said.

Mayorkas' comments come about a week after the federal government released the Border Patrol's use-of-force policies while the agency's chief issued a directive that reiterates how personnel should respond to threats.

Immigrant rights groups have complained that Border Patrol agents are too trigger-happy in responding to people who throw rocks at them along the border with Mexico, often to distract agents from smugglers sneaking drugs into the U.S.

Fisher, in a memorandum to all agency personnel on March 7, reminded agents that the "level of force applied must reflect the totality of the circumstances surrounding each situation."

While Border Patrol policy has always held that agents may use deadly force if there is a reasonable threat of imminent death or serious injury, Fisher's directive reminded agents that they shouldn't fire their weapons unless absolutely necessary.

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'Virtual' Border Fence Idea Revived. Another 'Billion Dollar Boondoggle'?

The Obama administration wants to build a virtual border fence of sensors and cameras in Arizona. But an earlier attempt failed and questions about the new plan are mounting.

By Lourdes Medrano, Correspondent

[Christian Science Monitor](#), March 20, 2014

Customs and Border Protection's Mark Borkowski has his pitch down. At a hearing of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security last week, he painted a portrait of what his agency's new plan to build a high-tech virtual fence along the Arizona portion of US-Mexico border would look like.

As many as 50 fixed towers that could detect illegal activity from miles away with cameras, radars, and sensors would be deployed as part of the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan. Other equipment, some of it already in use, would expand a network of ground sensors and the number of hand-held thermal imaging devices that allow agents to see at night.

But as the plan moves forward, it is running into criticism from lawmakers and officials who remember how things turned out the last time the federal government tried

this. Under President George W. Bush, the Department of Homeland Security (which oversees CBP) started a grand plan to blanket the 2,000-mile border in a high-tech virtual fence. In 2011, the Obama administration killed the program, called SBInet, which had covered 53 miles and cost \$1 billion.

Intense heat and inclement weather destabilized equipment. Sensors tracked animals instead of humans. It was, in the end, “a billion dollar boondoggle,” Rep. Beto O’Rourke (D) of Texas said at last week’s hearing.

This time will be different, said Mr. Borkowski, CBP’s assistant commissioner for the Office of Technology Innovation and Acquisition. The equipment has been tested in a similar environment to Arizona (Israel), and “what we saw in the demos was very impressive,” he said at the hearing.

Moreover, CBP will be trying to do less with less. Israel’s Elbit Systems, which also was involved with SBInet as a Boeing subcontractor, will begin installing towers this year as part of an overall project whose cost is estimated between \$500 million and \$700 million over 10 years.

But concerns are still percolating on Capitol Hill and beyond. Representative O’Rourke worries that illegal cross-border traffic is shifting to Texas, meaning the Arizona project is behind the times. And a report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released last week cautions that if CBP fails to strengthen oversight and expand testing of the fixed surveillance towers – the plan’s highest expense – the project could repeat the failures of SBInet.

For an agency determined to bring high-tech solutions to the border, CBP’s new gambit is fraught with high stakes.

CBP says the new, slimmer project will work because it is composed of tried and tested equipment tailored to distinct parts of the border. By contrast, SBInet had a one-size-fits-all approach for the entire stretch. Moreover, with SBInet, Boeing Co. wanted to develop new technology, Borkowski said. Though Elbit’s towers are similar to SBInet’s, they are simpler, more flexible, and “off-the-shelf.”

Elbit Systems, based in Haifa, works with Israeli police to help secure the country’s air, sea, and land entry points with its border control systems.

At the hearing, Borkowski acknowledged limited testing of the towers and agreed that CBP needs to collect better data on exactly how technology helps agents nab illegal border-crossers and drug smugglers. The idea is for the system to seamlessly record illegal border crossings and transmit the information to computers at a command center that can dispatch agents to identified locations as needed.

The GAO report cited lack of clear performance metrics, a master schedule, and life-cycle cost estimates as risks.

The project is already behind schedule, and the flow of illegal border crossings has begun shifting to Texas from Arizona. The border patrol’s Tucson sector recorded the highest number of arrests along the southern border for

nearly two decades, but in fiscal year 2013 it recorded 33,514 fewer than its Rio Grande Valley counterpart, which recorded 154,453.

While Congress members aired concerns last week, only O’Rourke called for suspending the project until CBP addresses identified weaknesses.

“I’m worried that we’re going to have something akin to SBInet again,” he said.

Subcommittee members said they would be keeping close tabs on the project, something lawmakers in Arizona also emphasize.

“I have seen firsthand the waste of taxpayer dollars, and I am determined that will not happen with this project,” said Rep. Ron Barber (D) of Arizona in a statement. His congressional district includes a large swath of the border.

The failure of SBInet was due in part to its complexity, says Christopher Bronk, an information technology fellow at Houston’s Rice University.

“It was a big, heavy, intelligence solution that was probably too ambitious for the mission and ended up becoming pretty expensive,” he says.

He thinks the Arizona plan, with solid performance measurements and effective management, has a good chance for success.

The watchdog group Taxpayers for Common Sense was no fan of SBInet, and the group’s vice president, Steve Ellis, says he can’t help but feel skeptical about the Arizona plan.

“Is it really necessary, is it going to be effective, is it going to return on the taxpayers’ investment?” he says. “These are all legitimate questions.”

For the National Border Patrol Council, the union representing agents, technology often can assist boots on the ground to do their job efficiently, provided it’s the right fit, says spokesman Shawn Moran.

Border Patrol Agents Rescue Pregnant Woman From All-American Canal

By Robert Hopwood

[Palm Springs \(CA\) Desert Sun](#), March 19, 2014

CALEXICO — U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents rescued a pregnant woman Tuesday from the All-American Canal near downtown.

Around 2:20 p.m., someone spotted a woman in distress in the canal and waved down a Border Patrol agent, officials announced Wednesday.

Two agents responding to the scene used a throw-bag to pull the woman to safety.

The undocumented woman, who was pregnant, complained that her legs were numb, “which could have been early signs of hypothermia,” according to officials.

She was taken to El Centro Regional Hospital and released. She then was taken to the Border Patrol's El Centro Sector station for further processing.

The incident occurred near the intersection of Anza Road and Weed Road west of downtown Calexico.

The All-American Canal, which runs along the U.S.-Mexico border, supplies irrigation water to the Imperial Valley.

It also is notoriously dangerous. As many as 550 people have drowned in the 82-mile canal since it was built in 1942, according to media reports.

Border Patrol Seize 237 Pounds Of Marijuana

[Yuma \(AZ\) News Now](#), March 20, 2014

Wellton, Arizona – Border Patrol agents assigned to Yuma Sector's Wellton Station seized 237 pounds of marijuana in two separate incidents, Tuesday.

Agents of the All-Terrain Vehicle Unit patrolling near Gila Bend were tracking the footprints of a group of suspected illegal aliens when they located three abandoned bundles of marijuana. The combined weight of the marijuana was 130 pounds worth an estimated \$58,500. An immediate search of the area revealed no smugglers.

In another incident, near Interstate 8, an agent performing an immediate search of an area where seven subjects had been previously apprehended found two bundles of marijuana. The bundles contained a combined weight 107 pounds valued at an estimated \$48,000.

The marijuana was seized for destruction per Yuma Sector Guidelines.

The Border Patrol's Yuma Sector effectively combats smuggling organizations attempting to transport contraband through southwestern Arizona. Citizens can help the Border Patrol and U.S. Customs and Border Protection by calling 1-866-999-8727 toll-free to report suspicious activity. Callers can remain anonymous.

Congressmen Working On Bill Proposal To Hold Border Patrol Accountable And Provide Training

[KNXV-TV Phoenix](#), March 20, 2014

A proposal for a new law aimed at improving training and accountability for U.S. Customs and Border Protection is moving forward.

Congressman Steve Pearce (R-N.M.) and Congressman Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas) are working on legislation that would include improved training for border patrol agents and hope to introduce the bipartisan bill by the end of the month.

The congressmen said their offices receive frequent reports of excessive force and other misconduct involving border patrol agents from people in their communities. Right

now there isn't a coherent complaint process, but legislation from the two congressmen aims to create one.

In early March, the border patrol announced new rules for agents in the field, reiterating how the agents should respond to fleeing vehicles and threats of violence. The directive from Border Patrol Chief Mike Fisher limits agents from shooting at moving vehicles or people throwing rocks at the them.

A recent independent review of border patrol shootings criticized the agency for "lack of diligence" in investigations. The review looked at 67 shooting incidents, resulting in at least 19 deaths, along the U.S. borders from 2010 to 2012.

One example of the stories their offices are hearing occurred Dec. 12, 2012 when a New Mexico woman was at the El Paso border entry port. She was subjected to more than six hours of searches on the suspicion she was carrying drugs. Border patrol officers found nothing.

Pearce said he hopes his proposal will help solve problems along the border.

"This proposal further emphasizes that together, our nation can find simple solutions to our broken system," Pearce said. "Together we are moving the ball forward."

The two congressmen are pushing for new legislation so all individuals, U.S. and non-U.S. citizens, are treated fairly and respectfully when crossing the border into the country.

In the border patrol directive, Fisher also reminded agents they should not place themselves in front of moving vehicles or use their body to block the vehicle in the case of opening fire on the driver.

Border patrol policy allows agents to use deadly force if there is a reasonable threat of serious injury or death. This directive reiterates that agents should not be using their weapons unless absolutely necessary.

Local communities will have close involvement in the development of the legislation. The proposal hopes to create new channels for individuals in border communities to resolve issues with border patrol.

It also hopes to create multiple levels of oversight and accountability within the border patrol and independent of the agency. One way this would be done is through a Border Oversight Commission, which would have subpoena authority to examine agents and their actions including, use of force and search and seizures.

The bipartisan proposal will also look at how to develop new changes to training programs for agents as well as establishing stringent tracking of migrant deaths.

ACLU Sets Up Checkpoint To Check On Border Patrol

By James Staley

[El Paso \(TX\) Times](#), March 20, 2014

LAS CRUCES >> The desert about 30 miles north of Las Cruces on Wednesday became the site of two checkpoints — the usual one by the U.S. Border Patrol and the other by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Travelers on Interstate 25 had to stop at the Border Patrol's but not at the ACLU's, which was set up to inform people about their rights at checkpoints and to determine how often federal agents violate those rights.

The ACLU's makeshift checkpoint was about a mile past the Border Patrol's and had few visitors — one motorist stopped to stretch his legs.

While Border Patrol agents checked for undocumented immigrants, drugs and other illegal matters, the ACLU was ready to document abuses and give out information.

Brian Erickson, a policy advocate with the ACLU's Regional Center for Border Rights, said he makes presentations about people's rights throughout Southern New Mexico and people often tell him about their experiences with Border Patrol agents and other law enforcement officers.

"Their testimony doesn't resonate with what their rights should be," he said when asked if there was a common complaint.

The ACLU's unofficial checkpoint Wednesday was the organization's first such setup, to interact with the community and learn about concerns, Erickson said.

"We're trying to see how widespread it is," he said.

Much of the information offered by the ACLU centered on duties and rights people have when passing through Border Patrol checkpoints — you must stop, for example, but still have the right to remain silent. U.S. citizens don't have to show ID, but noncitizens need to have immigration documents with them.

Erickson said the ACLU also examines the collaboration between federal and local law enforcement agencies, if the Border Patrol is staying within 100 miles of the border, as required, and if they are giving those who legally cross the border, in El Paso for example, all the information they need.

Erickson said it's common for some local residents to have a "general sense of fear" about interacting with law enforcement because of the possibility of the Border Patrol being called even when immigration matters are not involved.

Racial profiling and overly broad and unwarranted searches are problems reported locally, said Alyssa Telander, outreach coordinator for the New Mexico ACLU office.

That has been what Doña Ana County Commissioner Wayne Hancock has heard, too, he said.

Hancock was out chatting with the ACLU staff for part of Wednesday afternoon.

"People tend to think it's only a problem for them," Hancock said, referring to undocumented immigrants. "But it's a problem for all of us."

He said undocumented immigrants avoid law enforcement officials and will not come forward even if they are witnesses to crime or civil disputes. Hancock said that hinders justice for everybody.

To combat that, Hancock is planning to propose an ordinance banning county employees from asking any person about their immigration status.

Several Las Cruces law enforcement agencies have repeatedly denied racial profiling claims and add that they instruct officers not to ask about immigration information.

An intern at ACLU held signs informing motorists to pull into the checkpoint to get information or report violations of rights.

"Information here" and "report abuse here," read the signs.

A handful of drivers stopped at the ACLU's checkpoint Wednesday. One man just needed to stretch his legs, so he walked over.

Another said he was looking for information, but always had positive experiences with Border Patrol agents at checkpoints.

Even though the number of visitors to the ACLU checkpoint was low, Erickson said he had not decided whether to set up another one elsewhere at another time.

In Arizona, the ACLU has been at odds with the Border Patrol.

Last year, the ACLU of Arizona demanded an investigation into what it called abusive and harassing "roving patrols."

The ACLU described prolonged detentions and other forms of mistreatment by Border Patrol agents.

"In addition to unlawful vehicle stops, the ACLU has documented cases in which Border Patrol agents have interrogated pedestrians on the streets of Yuma and Tucson as well as patients in Tucson area hospitals," ACLU of Arizona Border Litigation Attorney James Lyall said in a letter to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General.

And in El Paso last week, the head of the Texas ACLU said that there needs to be greater scrutiny, accountability and transparency into deadly shootings and abuses by U.S. border agents.

"We believe somebody really needs to put their feet to the fire," said Terri Burke, executive director of the organization. Burke and two other ACLU officials spoke to the El Paso Times editorial board and members of the newspaper's community advisory board.

The ACLU is working on a letter expected to be released later this month with recommendations intended to curb deadly shootings by one of the nation's largest law enforcement agencies.

James Staley can be reached at 575-541-5476.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

ADMINISTRATION

Lapses During Airport Attack Draw Harsh Reactions

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles International Airport is inexcusably lacking in its capacity to deal with a crisis, local and national government officials said, describing communication lapses described in a report on last year's deadly airport shooting as a "failure" and an "embarrassment."

All of the officials were quick to praise the Transportation Security Administration officer who was killed and the officers who took down and arrested a suspect, but they said the airport's emergency response — hindered by communication problems and poor coordination — has to change quickly and thoroughly.

"I would say this is a nationwide failure so far," Mayor Eric Garcetti said about the inability of responding agencies to communicate with each other on their radios. "For us to be 13 years almost ... after 9/11 still trying to figure out a way to talk to each other frustrates me as a policymaker, frustrates me as the mayor of the second biggest city in America, frustrates me as a leader of this airport too, which is consistently a target for international terrorism and domestic terrorism."

Congresswoman Maxine Waters, whose district includes the airport, was more blunt, saying she was "shocked and dismayed" at the system that "clearly failed on this critical day."

"This report is an embarrassment," Waters said in a statement, noting the airport operator spends \$125 million a year on security. "With this level of investment, LAX should have a state-of-the-art emergency response system."

Garcetti expressed particular frustration over the lack of communication between the airport and travelers, many of whom were left clueless in the aftermath of the Nov. 1 incident. Garcetti said he found himself giving out information as he walked through the airport on the day of the attack, and that airport officials "shouldn't have to rely on people like myself."

The 83-page report released Tuesday was as notable for the lapses it left out as for those it highlighted.

While spotlighting flaws in various airport divisions, it did not single out individuals responsible for problems.

It also didn't mention that two airport police officers assigned to Terminal 3 were out of position without notifying dispatchers, as required, or discuss a decision months before the shooting to have police officers roam terminals instead of

staffing security checkpoints such as the one approached by the attacker.

The report was put together by a consultant based on findings by several agencies that responded to the shooting and a review of surveillance video, dispatch logs and 911 calls.

It cited the heroism of officers who shot and arrested Paul Ciancia after a TSA officer was killed and three other people were injured.

However, it also detailed problems in technology and coordination while including about 50 recommendations and lessons learned.

"Had the attacker not been highly selective in his targets," the report said, "the outcome might have been far different."

J. David Cox Sr., national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said Tuesday the lack of coordination was "absolutely unacceptable" and medical aid to the fatally wounded TSA officer should not have been delayed.

The Associated Press previously reported that the TSA officer who was shot was not taken to an ambulance for 33 minutes. He was declared dead at a hospital an hour later after being worked on by a trauma surgeon, but the coroner later said he died within five minutes of being shot.

The report notes that the lack of coordination of command posts contributed to a delay in getting help to victims.

"This report confirmed what we already knew — that the security processes and systems at LAX are fundamentally broken," Cox said.

The report called for training airport police in tactical medicine so they can help the injured before paramedics arrive, and for training paramedics to enter more dangerous zones earlier with law enforcement protection.

Cox also called the report incomplete and off-target in ignoring that law enforcement officers had been redeployed to roam terminals and that two officers were out of position when the shooting began.

LAX Police Chief Patrick Gannon said he was satisfied with the activities of the officers.

Cox called on the TSA and the airport board to take swift action to close security and emergency response gaps and said more needs to be done nationally to prevent such a situation from happening again. He said TSA officers, who are unarmed, shouldn't be in fear for their lives when going to work; they should know equipment will work and armed officers will be present when needed.

The TSA declined to comment on the report, saying a congressional hearing is planned next week in Los Angeles to discuss the shooting review.

Sean Burton, president of the board of airport commissioners, said LAX needs additional emergency

management staff, more training, new equipment and better agreements with other responding agencies.

Airport board members asked LAX officials to provide a timeline for implementing the recommendations in the report. The board will be receiving quarterly progress reports.

The report noted that airport police had previously upgraded to a \$5.4 million high-tech radio system but often couldn't communicate with the 20 or more agencies on scene.

In addition, senior police and fire commanders had no idea where to go or what the others were doing, and they didn't unify multiple command posts for 45 minutes. There was nearly no communication between command post officials and the airport's emergency operations center, which the report described as being staffed by untrained midlevel managers.

The review also confirmed earlier AP reports, including that a TSA supervisor picked up a red phone immediately after the first shots were fired but hastily fled as the gunman approached.

The airport police dispatcher who answered the call "only heard the sounds of shouting and gunshots. With no caller identification for a call from a red phone, and no one on the other end of the line, it was not initially known from where the call originated," the report states.

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EDITORIAL: Instead Of Pre-Check, Privatize TSA

[Las Vegas Review-Journal](#), March 20, 2014

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FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Parish Denies FEMA Allegations Over Gustav Cleanup

By Heidi R. Kinchen

[Baton Rouge \(LA\) Advocate](#), March 20, 2014

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's threat to have Livingston Parish's Hurricane Gustav debris removal monitors investigated for fraud is "gratuitous" and "improper," the parish's attorneys said.

FEMA has alleged that monitors hired by the parish to oversee the removal of leaning trees and hanging limbs from parish rights-of-way were inexperienced, poorly trained and submitted fraudulent claims.

The accusations of misconduct are "unfounded" and fail to explain how FEMA's own personnel on the ground could have missed such widespread fraud, the parish's attorneys said in the latest motion filed in the case.

At issue is the nearly \$59 million Livingston Parish is seeking from FEMA in unpaid cleanup costs stemming from the 2008 storm. The dispute is before the U.S. Civilian Board of Contract Appeals in Washington, D.C. The parish has asked for arbitration to settle the matter.

FEMA has denied \$14 million of the parish's \$16.6 million in claims for the "leaner and hanger" work and all of the \$44 million the parish submitted in claims for the debris cleared from the parish's waterways.

Calling FEMA's analysis of the parish's claims "highly flawed and incorrect," Livingston's legal team at Baker Hostetler said the federal agency has relied on skewed information, gross misstatements and omissions of fact in making its case against paying the parish.

The monitors of Professional Engineering Consultants and its subcontractor, Barowka and Bonura Engineers and Consultants, were neither inexperienced nor trained to defraud FEMA, lead attorney Hilary S. Cairnie said in the parish's motion filed Monday.

Less than 10 people trained the leaner and hanger monitors, according to the parish's motion. Of those trainers, the primary ones had "thousands of hours logged in disaster cleanup projects" before being assigned to Livingston Parish.

That included the monitor, Stephanie Stephens, whom FEMA claimed trained another monitor only five days after being trained herself.

Stephens actually had more than 900 hours of experience working on other disaster cleanup projects before Hurricane Gustav, according to the parish's motion.

The parish also argued FEMA's example of a monitor bundling small cut limbs together to meet size requirements was an anomaly.

FEMA required that limbs had to be 2 inches in diameter or larger before they could be cut and accused the monitors of bundling smaller limbs together to meet that minimum requirement.

"In fact, it is PEC's recollection that during its audit there were less than a dozen instances in 90,000 cuts of this taking place," the parish argued in its motion. "More importantly, when PEC came across such photos in its audit, the cuts were marked ineligible."

The parish also made short shrift of FEMA's assertion that monitors inappropriately relied on guidance from an arborist who worked for the debris removal contractor.

FEMA suggested arborist Wendell Anthony had a conflict of interest in running crews for the debris removal contractor while also training the monitors who oversaw the work.

Anthony has denied training any of the monitors.

"Nothing cited by FEMA suggests that (the monitors') inquiries were anything more than confirmation that the rotten trees were an issue of public safety and eligible for removal," the parish said in its motion.

The parish also challenged FEMA's denial of \$44 million in claims for waterway debris removal, saying the work was performed under the watch not only of the parish's monitors but also FEMA personnel.

In denying the claims, FEMA cited the parish's failure to secure permits, obtain rights of entry and remove only storm-related debris, among other problems.

However, the parish said FEMA representatives in the field consistently praised the contractors' work, only to have that support reversed after the work was completed.

Cleanup In Augusta Not As Widespread As The Storm Damage

By George Eskola

[WJBF-TV Augusta \(GA\)](#), March 20, 2014

Augusta, GA –

Behind the gate, it's in there, and residents of Summerchase say they want it out. "It's a mess in there, we need it cleaned up," said Louise Hicks, a resident.

Summerchase is like a lot of Augusta neighborhoods, in that it suffered extensive limb damage from last month's ice storm.

"My neighbor's tree fell on my property and I have all the debris in my yard and I'm not happy," said Gabriele Wade.

But, Summerchase is different from other neighborhoods. It's a private gated community and city officials say the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) frowns on reimbursing for storm cleanup on private property. But, Summerchase is still part of the city, with residents paying water bills and garbage fees.

"I feel like anybody who's paying property taxes deserves the right that anybody else has," says Wade.

City officials are planning to change direction in Summerchase and pick up the storm debris, but there's no guarantee FEMA will pick up the tab.

"This is to help our citizens. It is a risk, the town was overwhelmed with this," says Interim Deputy City Administrator Steve Cassell.

But, missing storm pick-up isn't reserved for gated communities. In deep south Augusta, on Deans Bridge Road, piles of storm debris sit waiting.

"It's been sitting out there, continues to sit out there, and we haven't heard anything about it, when it's going to be picked up, nothing," said Amy Kitchens, one of the residents with piles of storm damage sitting on the right-of-way.

This is because Deans Bridge Road is a state route and it's the state's job to pick up the storm damage here.

"It's a state route, it's not our right-of-way. The state has responsibility of that roadway," says Cassell.

But, along that state route, there is the wish the city would treat them like a gated community. "The gated communities have more options than we do. We're rural, if they're going to do [it] there, why not here," Kitchens said.

Cassell says Augusta is working on an agreement with the state to get the limbs picked up, if the state would cover the city's costs above the FEMA reimbursement. City officials say the state has not agreed to that, but has said it would take care of the debris on state routes.

Municipal Officials Meet With FEMA Staff

By Molly McGowan

[Burlington \(NC\) Times-News](#), March 20, 2014

Representatives with the Federal Emergency Management Agency met with Burlington city staff Tuesday as part of the agency's preliminary damage assessment of the March 6 and 7 ice storm in Alamance County.

The federal agency has been in the county since early this week at the urging of the N.C. Division of Emergency Management, which is currently performing an initial state debris assessment.

On Monday, NCEM officials met in Graham with representatives of Alamance County and municipalities within the county affected by the ice storm.

The state officials discussed the county and state thresholds that must be met in order for a county and its municipalities to be eligible for FEMA money, outlined FEMA's process of making a disaster declaration, and answered questions about the meticulous documentation each entity required before FEMA can reimburse for emergency services — once a disaster declaration is made.

"In order for the state of North Carolina to receive a declaration, we have to have— statewide — about \$13.3 million worth of damages," said Joe Stanton, assistant director of emergency management with NCEM. "We believe that this incident ... has created enough damages that we will be able to seek a declaration."

Countywide, municipalities will have to meet a \$528,958 threshold, which is based on 2010 census data for Alamance County, Stanton said.

"We believe that you all have more than surpassed that," he said.

That's why the NCEM invited FEMA officials to Alamance County for the initial debris assessment, which is normally performed by state officials before FEMA gets involved.

"We saw that the numbers exceeded the threshold," and the damage was "severe enough" to warrant FEMA's presence in the county during the initial assessment, Stanton said.

The event cost Alamance County about \$1.4 million in damages, he said, and the statewide total is \$20 million to \$25 million.

ONCE ALL THE affected municipalities' and counties' expenses are documented, and if they exceed the \$13.3 million, the governor would send a letter describing the severity of the incident to President Barack Obama and ask for a declaration. Stanton said FEMA would provide documents either supporting or disputing the governor's claims — which is why FEMA is involved in the documentation process.

Once the president makes a disaster declaration, FEMA will hold "applicant briefings," at which point the affected cities and counties would request public assistance. Stanton said each applicant would then be assigned a FEMA project officer who'd hold a kickoff meeting to review the damages; the damages would be sorted into "projects," which are treated almost like grants and thus be considered for funding.

Stanton said FEMA funds 75 percent of such approved projects, and the remaining 25 percent is a nonfederally funded share. He said historically, North Carolina has picked up that 25 percent share.

"Right now, what we're after is for you to start documenting," Stanton said.

ANDY INNIS, section manager for public assistance with NCEM, explained that it's unlikely every eligible entity will get every dime spent on emergency expenses and debris removal reimbursed — but that keeping track of every penny puts them in better standing to receive some sort of reimbursement.

Innis told cities that if they were removing debris using regular staff and city equipment, the key is to log everything, down to the chainsaw used and who used it.

"Usually when you're using your own equipment, you don't track how often you use it since you don't bill yourself," Innis said.

But in this case, he encouraged municipalities' staff to document the equipment and personnel used, and for how long, as well as the quantity of debris hauled to further justify equipment costs.

If cities or the county contracted another company to remove the debris, which Burlington did, Innis said, it was important to solicit bids for the most competitive contract price.

"In most cases, FEMA is going to expect a good bid," he said.

The state officials expressed interest in having FEMA representatives meet with other cities' staff this week, and the goal is to have the governor's letter prepared and ready to be signed by next week.

By Brian McCauley

[Osawatomie \(KS\) Graphic](#), March 20, 2014

Osawatomie officials have a clearer picture about the status of the city's levee system and possible future changes to flood plain maps after meeting with engineers from the Federal Emergency Management Agency last week.

Rick Nusz, a hydraulic engineer with FEMA Region VII in Kansas City, led the discussion. Osawatomie City Manager Don Cawby, Mayor Mark Govea and other city officials also were present at the March 12 meeting of the local levee partnership team at Memorial Hall.

Nusz emphasized that FEMA has not funded any new mapping projects that would impact the Osawatomie area, but a consulting firm has been hired to create a work plan describing how Osawatomie's levees would be classified if a new mapping program were to be funded by FEMA in the future. Nusz said the earliest that could happen would be the 2015 fiscal year, which begins in October.

Nusz said that levees must meet FEMA guidelines to be accredited, and FEMA previously ignored non-accredited levee systems, such as the one protecting Osawatomie from the Marais des Cygnes River to the north and Pottawatomie Creek to the south.

New regulations, though, acknowledge that non-accredited levees provide some protection and could gain new classifications based on a number of requirements mapped out in the Levee Analysis and Mapping Procedure (LAMP).

Osawatomie officials said the biggest issue with the levee system right now is the southwest portion of the Pottawatomie Creek levee, which is designated freeboard-deficient because it doesn't meet the regulatory freeboard criteria. Freeboard is the vertical distance between the top of the levee and the 1-percent-annual-chance flood, according to FEMA documents.

Todd Henson of Strategic Alliance for Risk Reduction, the consulting firm hired by FEMA to create the work plan, said that if Osawatomie officials make minor repairs to the northern levee and submit all of the information about their system, including the freeboard deficiency in the southwest section, to FEMA, he would update the work plan with that information.

Henson added that the new regulations allow for different sections of a levee to be categorized separately if they are hydraulically independent of each other. The southwest portion of the Pottawatomie Creek levee likely would lead to a Zone D designation for land in southern Osawatomie, while the Marais des Cygnes portion could be accredited, leading to a shaded Zone X designation. In both designations, flood insurance would be optional, but it would be more expensive in Zone D.

City And FEMA Officials Discuss Levees

Nusz added that internal drainage, which is the water that pools inside levee-protected areas, could still lead to some areas being designated as special flood hazards.

Cawby thanked the officials for giving the city an idea of what to do moving forward. He said the city has been trying to determine a cost-benefit analysis of what it would take to fix the southwest portion of the levee system or abandon some of the flood plain and spend money elsewhere.

Henson said STARR will begin writing the work plan and get back in touch with the city in about a month.

Displaced By Sandy, LI Renters Long For Home

By Victor Manuel Ramos
[Newsday](#), March 19, 2014

Laura Manno of Long Beach lost everything in superstorm Sandy. She has a part-time job and has rental assistance until April but doesn't know what she will do if she can't pay rent.

Long Island renters displaced by superstorm Sandy, facing a lack of available housing and rising costs, are increasingly desperate to find stable places to live 17 months after the storm – and to avoid eviction or even homelessness.

The disaster left these storm victims – in many cases residents with little to spare – competing for housing with one another and with flooded-out homeowners, further straining a rental market in Nassau and Suffolk counties that lacks affordable options.

The tally of damaged rental units from that terrible night in October 2012, plus tropical storms Irene and Lee in 2011, rose to nearly 9,000 on Long Island alone, government figures show.

New York's disaster recovery officials said they are set to roll out programs to address the continuing dearth of rental housing. But for Henrietta Adler and other tenants struggling to find a decent place to live, time is running out fast.

Adler, a single mother in Oceanside, said she and her children – Daniel, 18, and Raquel, 17 – have moved three times since Sandy flooded their first-floor apartment in the Woodcrest Village Park complex. They have gone from staying in someone's living room for two months, to sleeping in a relative's basement, to taking a temporary second-floor apartment back at Woodcrest.

Last month, she received a letter from a representative of the complex's management, saying she must vacate by the end of this month. Tenants and a FEMA spokesman said the 105-unit complex, built in 1976, is slated for demolition because of storm damage.

The for-rent places has found cost several hundred dollars more each month than the \$1,550 she was paying before Sandy took muck from a canal and plunked it in the

family's two-bedroom apartment. She continues to pay that amount in her current apartment.

"It's just destroying me," said Adler, 56, a cashier at a natural-foods supermarket and a real estate agent. "I am devastated, and I feel the same as when I was homeless right after the storm. Even though I am sitting on my couch, I don't feel settled at all."

Representatives of the Woodcrest Village Park Association and the Feil Organization that manage and own the buildings did not respond to multiple requests for comment on their tenants.

Few options for renters

Long Island's underlying housing shortage left renters with few options after Sandy's wind-driven waters flooded the building complexes, houses and basements in which they lived, said Richard Guardino, executive dean of the Wilbur F. Breslin Center for Real Estate Studies at Hofstra University.

"When you start out with a deficit and you try to add all these potential renters, two things happen: Rents go up, and people have a difficult time trying to find a place," he said.

While "there's a human concern there for fellow Long Islanders," Guardino said it's also in the region's long-term economic interests to assist renters. "Long Island has a significant service industry, and if the people aren't there, ultimately the industries will suffer."

Many were pushed to the verge of homelessness by Sandy, said Melissa McCrumb, a senior organizer on Staten Island with the advocacy group Make The Road New York, a nonprofit membership organization in working-class communities.

"It's a much tighter housing market," McCrumb said. "Landlords have not gotten enough resources to rebuild and so, as a result, they are repairing their houses out-of-pocket . . . and it's renters that bear the brunt."

In areas affected by Sandy, she said, residents "have seen huge rent increases."

Long Island's rental vacancy rate of 4.3 percent means the region has fewer available units than any other suburban area in the New York region, according to a September 2013 study by the New York City-based Regional Plan Association. The report, which pegged the overall suburban vacancy rate at 6.7 percent, noted that Sandy had only exacerbated the situation.

The storm response mobilized government resources through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the state's reconstruction programs collectively known as New York Rising, and a host of nonprofit relief efforts.

FEMA funds were intended as a stopgap to help people get back on their feet, not to address long-term housing needs, officials said.

\$45M for LI renters

As of Jan. 31, FEMA had disbursed more than \$45 million in emergency aid to 19,000 Sandy-displaced renter households on Long Island, according to agency figures. That included funds to assist with rent and to replace clothing and furniture.

In 13 counties in the state that reported Sandy damage – including New York City's five boroughs – FEMA gave more than \$132 million to nearly 74,000 renter households. More than 53,000 of those were in the city.

State disaster recovery officials said help is coming from a separate funding stream – the millions in Community Development Block Grant funds from HUD going to the New York Rising program.

From \$3.8 billion coming to the state, not including New York City, in two installments of block-grant funds, \$200 million is designated specifically to repair, preserve and develop rental housing to bolster affordability. Officials with NY Rising called it a substantial investment to fund rental projects.

Adler has gotten about \$13,000 from FEMA for damages and rent during the family's three moves and to help replace her ruined car, clothing, furniture and appliances. She is basically tapped out.

"By the time they build and decide where they are going to build is, like, it could be forever," she said. "I need to live somewhere now."

Renters on Long Island with low to moderate incomes were hit hard by Sandy.

Households that earned less than 80 percent of the area's median income occupied about eight of every 10 rental units outside New York City that sustained major to severe damage, according to the latest version of the state's "action plan," which must be approved by HUD for receipt of block grant funds. The document set 80 percent of median annual income for Nassau and Suffolk counties at \$67,000.

The majority of renters in the most damaged housing were on Long Island – 6,249 in Nassau County and 1,340 in Suffolk County, according to the state estimates.

Most of those rentals were in Baldwin, Bellmore, East Atlantic Beach, East Rockaway, Freeport, Inwood, Island Park, Long Beach, Massapequa, Oceanside and Seaford in Nassau, and Amityville, Babylon, Lindenhurst and Mastic Beach in Suffolk, according to the state.

The number of displaced tenants probably is larger than official estimates, partly because many ground-floor and basement apartments didn't have certificates of occupancy, or residents were doubled up but didn't have a legal lease, said a FEMA official involved in relief efforts in the region.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo acknowledged the challenge when previewing the latest allocation of funds for disaster recovery during his State of the State address in January, saying there is "a crisis" in affordable housing and that addressing the issue should be a priority.

Long Beach renter hit hard

Laura Manno, in Long Beach's West End, was one of the many renters in dire straits after Sandy flooded underground and first-floor apartments, tore down walls and blew away roofs.

Manno, 59, a former presentations coordinator for a lower Manhattan financial firm, had spent years recovering from the trauma of experiencing Sept. 11, 2001, and losing her job near Ground Zero. She took jobs in sales, used up her savings, filed for bankruptcy, and was unemployed and looking just before the storm.

Sandy took every object she owned. Seawater went into her first-floor apartment and "twisted everything as if it was a washing machine," splitting her bed diagonally and burying all her clothes and appliances in muddy sand. She saw her car, a 2006 Ford Escape, "spinning in the middle of the ocean," its lights flashing.

She has been drifting since. She stayed at her mother's house in Queens for a time, then took a temporary studio above an abandoned commercial building. Now she is back in Long Beach in a building owned by her previous landlord, renting one room with a bathroom for \$1,150 a month.

She will run out of rent aid by the end of April and doesn't know what will happen then.

"I am very nervous and apprehensive," said Manno, who works part time at a thrift shop and is applying for disability because of her post-traumatic stress disorder. "I don't know where I'm heading next, and I really don't want to move in with a relative at my age . . . I have been worried I would end up living in a cardboard box."

The Governor's Office of Storm Recovery has plans to help, though officials acknowledge timeliness is a concern.

Programs will be rolled out "in the coming weeks" to fund repair of damaged rentals and, eventually, construct 3,000 new rental units in suburban communities with the \$200 million in federal block grant funds.

Another \$7.5 million would fund a Sandy Housing Assistance Relief Program to aid low-income tenants teetering toward homelessness with rent and utility payments, but the state did not disclose when that relief would become available.

"We want to provide affordable housing," said Seth Diamond, the recovery office's director. "We will seek to have geographic balance, obviously, where the need is greatest, but we will also be looking for creative proposals, ones that can serve a particular need in the community," including reaching "populations that are underserved that need affordable housing."

Grants to landlords

Among the first steps will be grants to landlords and homeowners for repairs and improvements to prepare for future storms. The state will give priority to projects that benefit low- and moderate-income people, while requiring

landlords of multifamily units to keep a portion of the rentals affordable.

The state expects to accept proposals soon and see repair projects funded “in a matter of months,” Diamond said.

V. Elaine Gross, an advocate with the group ERASE Racism that has been calling for affordable housing that is accessible to minority communities, said those plans are “certainly encouraging,” but hopes the projects aren’t concentrated on neighborhoods where there already is a multifamily glut.

“Are we creating new segregated housing, or are we taking this opportunity to build affordable housing in higher-opportunity areas?” Gross asked.

Despite the state’s plans, Chanchal Verma is among the tenants who feel abandoned.

She lives with her husband and 12-year-old son, a special-needs child who can’t transfer easily to another school, in Woodcrest Village Park, the Oceanside complex asking tenants to leave by March 31.

For Verma’s family, the storm was “a major financial setback” that took about \$10,000 out of their savings. Both she and her husband work; because of their income level, they did not qualify for relief beyond three months of rent assistance.

“They basically help you initially and then say you are on your own, but you still have the same issues,” said Verma, 35, an insurance claims adjuster. “We are not rich enough to really solve our own issues . . . but we are not poor enough to get help.”

Some landlords, who could seek grants to repair property, aren’t convinced that government funds will make much of a difference. They have been down the road of being denied government loans, and believe assistance is coming too late for many who couldn’t afford repairs earlier.

“Unfortunately, it’s coming 18 months removed,” said Joseph Iorio, who manages several buildings for his family’s Arcadia Management company in Long Beach, including the ones where Laura Manno has bounced from apartment to apartment since the storm.

He estimates his company’s storm losses, after insurance, at about a half-million dollars.

‘No confidence’ in relief aid

Paul Palmieri, of the Coalition of Landlords, Homeowners and Merchants, based in the Village of Babylon, is skeptical about promised relief.

“I have no confidence that much of that money will make it to the small landlords – maybe a trickle,” Palmieri said. “Most landlords have probably tried to fix up their properties or abandoned them by now.”

Palmieri added that it’s not always the case that landlords have raised rents in storm-ravaged areas. The cost of doing business has gone up, he said, as local governments

“just come in and write tickets” for code violations instead of helping landlords recover.

The nonprofit safety net has helped some renters who qualified for assistance.

Catholic Charities, among other organizations, has guided renters to permanent housing, with case managers so far helping scores of tenants in Nassau and Suffolk navigate a variety of programs.

As of Feb. 1, Catholic Charities had helped 162 out of 182 displaced renter households it tracked in Nassau and 23 out of 25 in Suffolk to find and secure rental units, said Mary Bossart, disaster case management coordinator for the agency in Amityville.

“We are definitely continuing to deal with the need as it presents itself,” Bossart said.

Lance Westmoreland had been living in the first level of a Lawrence house lacking a roof, electricity and running water for about three months when he got help from the agency.

He had given up on finding a comparable rent of \$700 a month.

“I lived in that house for over 20 years and had nowhere to go,” said Westmoreland, 53, who worked as a plumber before he was disabled by a stroke.

The agency placed him in senior-citizen housing in Rockville Centre. But he had to send his son and two daughters, ages 11 to 17, to live in Brooklyn with their mother.

It broke his heart to part from them, he said. “The storm just made life worse and harder for me,” Westmoreland said. “I couldn’t put myself together from this storm because Sandy just came and took everything.”

Island Park resident Sue Hecht lost most of her belongings on the day of the storm when a toilet became “like a water fountain” in the basement where she had stored many of her things, bringing up to 7 feet of dirty water into the house.

Hecht, 44, said that renters like her have been treated like “an afterthought” and there has been “no consistent rhyme or reason” in how some were denied financial help.

She received one month of FEMA assistance toward her \$1,000 monthly rent, she said, and pegged her losses at about \$36,000. She is living in the same house, which she says is plagued by mold, because she can’t afford to move.

“It’s been rough,” said Hecht, an unemployed social worker. “It took me 20-some-odd years as a single person to build up to everything I owned . . . and in one day, it’s gone forever.”

Times Square To Sea Bright For Rebuilt Sandy Home

By Kevin Pentón, Susanne Cervenka

[Asbury Park \(NJ\) Press](#), March 18, 2014

SEA BRIGHT — The winds and water surge generated by superstorm Sandy cut gashes into Leslie Morris' home, allowing passers-by to stare into what previously had been her private domain.

As Morris finally gets to the rebuilding process, 17 months after the storm, she will not do it anonymously. Rather, workers will assemble her new home's frame this week in the middle of Times Square.

The high-profile job by Habitat for Humanity — to be broadcast on ABC's Good Morning America on Thursday — is part of a larger effort to attract volunteers, donor dollars and attention to the nonprofit builder.

To read more stories about the rebuild since superstorm Sandy, see Jersey Shore Recovery.

But for Morris, a dental assistant living in a federal shelter since December 2012, the three-day effort in the center of Manhattan marks the beginning of her return to a new normal in a new home.

"Only one month ago, everything was terrible, my future felt hopeless," she said. "This is really exciting. I'm totally elated."

Morris is paying for the work with proceeds from a \$150,000 grant from the state Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Elevation and Mitigation program, she said.

Lowe's Home Improvement will donate the wood, said Kate Nelson, volunteer coordinator with Habitat of Monmouth.

Once the work in Times Square is complete Friday, volunteers will disassemble the pieces, transport them to Sea Bright, and reassemble them, Nelson said.

But the reconstruction in Sea Bright can't happen until the foundation is ready. And that work has been held up because of the cold weather and snow. Once that's done, reframing should take about three days, Nelson said.

Morris will then need to wait for a roofer, plumber and electrician — specialty trades for which Habitat does not use laymen volunteers — to complete work.

"It will probably be four months until the house is ready to move into," Nelson said.

Habitat has helped more than 70 families in northeast Monmouth County whose homes were damaged by Sandy. Most of the work has been in Union Beach, Keansburg, Middletown and Highlands, she said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced last week that people who remain at their shelter at Fort Monmouth can stay through the end of August, a four-month extension from a previous deadline.

But beginning in May, Morris and other families living at the fort will need to pay the federal government rent, as living subsidies expire 18 months after a disaster.

To stay in her three-bedroom unit, Morris will have to cut the federal government monthly checks of \$1,865, the

2014 fair-market rate for Monmouth County, according to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"Having to pay the government money to stay in a shelter, after how they handled the recovery, is just obscene," Morris said. "We're hoping they come to their senses."

Most Flood Buyouts Completed » Local News » Press-Republican

By LOHR McKINSTRY

[Plattsburgh \(NY\) Press Republican](#), March 20, 2014

JAY — The first demolitions of flood-damaged homes in Essex County's buyout program began Wednesday.

The teardowns are starting a little more than two and a half years after the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Irene.

The home, previously owned by William and Tammy Freeborn and located at 11 Randys Lane in Jay, was the first in line to be flattened as part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Property Acquisition and Buyout Program managed by Essex County.

The property is located directly across the road from the East Branch of the Ausable River.

The Essex County Department of Public Works and Jay Town Highway Department are doing the work.

'HUGE ACHIEVEMENT'

When the homes in the flood buyout program are cleared, the land can only be used for parks and other green space.

Jay Supervisor Randy Douglas praised those who helped with what he said was a "huge achievement," including County Attorney Daniel Manning III, County Board of Supervisors Vice Chair and Town of Keene Supervisor William Ferebee, County Community Resources Director Mike Mascarenas and County Community Development Coordinator Lynn Donaldson.

"Many colleagues and staff on both the town and county levels all played a role in bringing this process to fruition," Douglas said in a news release.

It's a fully funded project, Douglas said, with FEMA paying 75 percent and New York state contributing the remaining 25 percent through a Community Development Block Grant.

'END IN SIGHT'

Douglas said that's a formula he and his colleagues rallied for and successfully obtained. The county was originally supposed to pay a percentage of the costs, but the state is now taking the full amount FEMA isn't covering.

"It feels good to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, as we and the owners of these flooded parcels begin to put this long and drawn-out process behind us and begin the healing process," he said in the release.

"Unfortunately, given the length of time this process has taken, two homeowners involved in the buyout have passed away; however, their family members will see the benefits of the program and finally have some closure."

'MOST TRYING TIME'

Essex County is taking down more than two dozen homes as part of the buyout program and has secured a \$5.5 million bond to cover costs until reimbursements come in from the federal and state agencies.

"It has clearly been the most trying time my staff, the town board and (Jay) DPW Director Chris Garrow and his crew and I have faced throughout our tenure here at the Town of Jay," Douglas said.

"Along with seeing homeowners of flooded parcels being relieved of the burden of their properties, it is also rewarding to see the Town of Jay rebuilding in the wake of the disaster."

OUT OF THE WRECKAGE

The town took a pounding from Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, including damage to the town's water and sewage plants and youth center.

"Through hard work and diligence we have come out of the wreckage with refurbished youth facilities and an improved, stronger water and sewer infrastructure, as well as many other improvement projects still in progress," Douglas said.

The buyout homes are in the towns of Jay, Keene, Moriah, Essex, North Hudson and Westport. All are either on the Ausable River, Boquet River or East Mill Brook. Closings on most of the homes were completed last week.

Post-Irene Demolition Begins Today

[Adirondack \(NY\) Daily Enterprise](#), March 20, 2014

The FEMA Property Acquisition and Buyout Program begins demolishing homes in Essex County today.

The homes that were chosen were severely damaged by Tropical Storm Irene more than two-and-a-half years ago.

The first house to be taken down is in the town of Jay at 11 Randys Lane, previously owned by William and Tammy Freeborn.

FEMA covered 75 percent of the funding for the process, and the state covered 25 percent through a Community Development Block Grant.

Essex County Board of Supervisors Chairman Randy Douglas said he wants homeowners and family members affected by the storm to finally have closure.

"Many (Essex County colleagues) and staff on both the town and county levels all played a role in bringing this process to fruition," Douglas wrote in a press release. "It feels good to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel as we and the owners of these flooded parcels begin to put this long and drawn out process behind us and begin the healing process."

Douglas said because of how long the project took to complete, two homeowners died during that time; however, he added that their family members will see the benefits of the buyouts.

"Along with seeing homeowners of flooded parcels being relieved of the burden of their properties, it is also rewarding to see the town of Jay rebuilding in the wake of the disaster," Douglas said.

Douglas and Keene town Supervisor William Ferebee recently spoke with U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Charles Schumer, as well as Rep. Bill Owens, about streamlining the FEMA buyout process.

County Demolishes Irene-ravaged Home | New York – WPTZ Home

By Alison Carey

[WPTZ-TV Burlington \(VT\)](#), March 20, 2014

After Tropical Storm Irene swept through the Northeast, President Barack Obama announced \$62 billion from the Federal Emergency Management Agency will go to New York and New Jersey to help with the recovery effort.

Essex County, N.Y., is using the money to buy out damaged homes and demolish them.

About two and a half years after Irene came rolling through, the first home in Essex County, is being demolished as part of the FEMA buyout program.

The home along the Au Sable River is one of about 30 homes in the county slated to be taken down.

"Hurricane Irene was the most trying time for all of us here in the North Country, especially in the towns of Jay and Keene. We saw such devastation that we've never experienced before," said Town of Jay town supervisor Randy Douglas.

"Diving up here to the site, we were reminiscing about which homes and the roads that were washed out, and we're still recovering," said Essex County Public Works superintendent Anthony LaVigne.

According to Douglas, FEMA is giving Essex County 75 percent of the money needed to buy and demolish the Irene-ravaged homes. The remaining 25 percent will come from the state.

"There's lots of regulations before you can even get to this process. It's been two years and seven months and it's certainly an emotional time," said Douglas.

Douglas is hopeful that the buyout coupled with a ban on building in flood-prone areas will keep homeowners and public safety workers out of harm's way.

"Months after Irene, we brought all the homeowners together and they told us it was going to be a long process, so it's so hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we're here now and we're glad we are," said Douglas.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

SERVICE

Measure To Offer In-state Tuition To Immigrant Students Moves Closer To Passage

By JAMES L. ROSICA

[Tampa \(FL\) Tribune](#), March 19, 2014

TALLAHASSEE — A bill that would grant in-state tuition to Florida students who entered or stayed in the country illegally has moved one step closer to passage in the state House of Representatives.

Lawmakers on Wednesday discussed but did not vote on the measure (HB 851).

The bill will come back to the floor for a vote today. Some version of the legislation has been offered every session for the past 11 years.

House members did adopt an amendment that brings the state university tuition differential – the added cost a school can charge unilaterally without an approved tuition increase – down from 15 percent to 6 percent.

The same amendment requires students to have attended “a secondary school in this state for four consecutive years immediately before high school graduation,” adding an additional year.

Democrats challenged that provision, saying it would penalize exceptional students who are able to finish high school in fewer than the traditional four years.

House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, defended the change after Wednesday night’s floor session, saying it makes the bill more palatable to members of both chambers.

“It says that someone has to spend their entire four years of high school in the state of Florida, at a Florida high school, before they can qualify for in-state tuition,” he said. “It’s a compromise ... we think it’s still a great bill.”

Weatherford supports the bill, though other lawmakers have inveighed against it.

Sen. Lizbeth Benacquisto, R-Fort Myers, called the measure an “incentive for illegal immigration.” Benacquisto also is running for the congressional seat previously held by Trey Radel, who resigned after a drug charge.

Rep. Mark Pafford, D-West Palm Beach, said the change weakened the bill.

“We’re walking back the original bill that would have been very, very beneficial to so many people who just want an education,” he said. “I think for a 12 month difference” – referring to the extra year requirement – “it’s pretty pathetic.”

Bill sponsor Jeanette Nuñez, R-Miami, disagreed. “I don’t think this weakens it,” she said. “For people to say this is pathetic, or that we’re not going to help a vast majority of students, is very sad.”

She also told fellow lawmakers that the proposal wouldn’t shut out state residents from getting into college or paying lower tuition.

“No Florida resident will be displaced by an undocumented immigrant,” she said. “Not one single, solitary individual legal resident will be displaced.”

The measure is fracturing the Republican caucuses in both chambers. A Senate version (SB 1400) backed by Clearwater Republican Jack Latvala squeaked by its first committee on a 5-4 vote and still has three committees to clear. That bill requires only three years.

Gov. Rick Scott has said he supports the measure in principle.

L.A. Mayor ‘Still Optimistic’ About Immigration Reform

[WBUR-FM Boston](#), March 19, 2014

JEREMY HOBSON, HOST:

Well, here in Los Angeles, Ukraine is on people’s minds. So is Flight 370. But so are some things that are happening right here in Southern California. There was a moderate earthquake this week, 4.4 on the Richter scale. There is a big drought going on. The film industry that has defined this area is being lured away by other states. And we’re going to talk about a lot of that now with the Mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti. Mayor Garcetti, welcome back to HERE AND NOW.

MAYOR ERIC GARCETTI: Great to have you in L.A.

HOBSON: Well, we had you on the show the very first day that you were in office and our first day on the air. What has been the toughest challenge for you so far?

GARCETTI: So I really didn’t know what I was talking about that first day.

HOBSON: You were pretty good on the first day.

GARCETTI: No, lucky I’d been here for 12 years. But as a mayor, it’s a totally different job. I have been so surprised by just the raw ingredients that are out here in Los Angeles and how strong they are, not just the weather that you’re experiencing, the geography, kind of the intersection between Latin America, the Pacific Rim and the United States but also just some of the human capital, three top 25 universities, that really the city of Los Angeles and our government had never reached out to.

Looking at the number of engineers we graduate, the tech firms, one every 40 hours that we’re creating out here, there’s kind of a rebirth of the city, and it’s a very exciting time because it’s like having some clay in your hands and saying we can create the sort of city we want. We don’t have to be the traffic capital of the country. We don’t have to be a place that’s just about low-wage jobs. We can redefine what not just Los Angeles but I think a great American city looks like.

And to me that's been the big surprise, just how wide open that field is, waiting for somebody to come and to lead and to bring people together.

HOBSON: What's been the toughest thing you've had to deal with?

GARCETTI: The toughest thing I had to deal with early on was, you know, a couple days after we talked was the first tough contract with our Department of Water and Power workers. We sat down with that union. There's a lot of pressure to pass a contract early on, and the campaign had really been about restoring pride in that entity and restoring some sort of accountability.

We were able to hold the line in the first couple weeks when people are testing your mettle. Are you going to be able to push forward? And we got a great contract working together with that union that's no raises for three years for the first time in 20 years, controlling costs and pensions. You know, those moments, they come quick, everybody's watching. If you don't do them right, they'll kind of walk all over you for the rest of your term.

But we were able to do in a tough, responsible and fair way.

HOBSON: As you've watched from afar what has happened in Detroit as it's tried to get itself back to financial health and has had to break a lot of promises that it made to city workers, do you see that as something that cities around the country are going to have to deal with, or is that more the exception than the rule?

GARCETTI: It's definitely an exception in terms of the scale, but I think it will be more of the rule, especially for cities that ignored the writing on the wall over the past five years. And as the economy recovers, the pressure will seem less. I'm very glad that Los Angeles, we actually did face the music. We did the biggest package of pension reform in the midst of the recession, and credit to our workers and our city unions for coming to the table and figuring out a way that it was better for their own members and their future members than burying our heads in the sand and pretending it didn't exist.

That said, we're not out of the woods even in Los Angeles, but it's a fundamentally different picture than places like Detroit. Our population is growing here. More people visited here than last year than ever. More people are studying here than we've ever had. So by those metrics, L.A. is still a place that business, people, students and investment wants to come.

Our challenge is going to be just continuing to control those costs so we can deliver a good level of city services.

HOBSON: I want to ask you about immigration reform because it appears that that is not going anywhere this year in Washington. You have called on President Obama to cut down on deportations. A number of people have asked him to start doing that. Tell us what you want him to do and why.

GARCETTI: Well, I'm still optimistic that we actually can get immigration reform this year. I don't think it'll happen before the primaries, but either in the lame-duck session or after the primaries, in between the primaries and the general. There's a lot of Republicans who favor this and want to vote for it and enough Democrats, as well, to pass it. So I don't close that door.

In the meantime we're working very closely with the Obama administration on helping those kids that are here through deferred action to actually get legal status. And my only point with Secretary Johnson who visited here, new Homeland Security secretary, and also in my conversations with the president, I've been very consistent that the level of deportations for things that aren't serious crime have gone up to record levels.

Let's spend that money instead in taking the two million people who qualify today for citizenship, who are here legally with papers, and turn them into citizens.

HOBSON: What do you make of the nickname that some immigration activists have given the president, which would be deporter in chief?

GARCETTI: Oh, I don't use that term. I'm very close with the president. He has fought an incredible fight to bring immigration reform back to the agenda and deserves tremendous credit for that. I think he has been the advocate we've been waiting for for a long time. So he's our advocate in chief.

I think there's changes you can always make in the implementation of policies, including deportation. But this is the president we've been waiting for for a long time.

HOBSON: Well, why do you think that immigration reform didn't happen this year?

GARCETTI: I think the Republican leadership so far has refused to put a vote forward. I think for the primaries, those who are getting attacked from the right don't want to vote on it, and those who – who genuinely aren't for it don't want to vote for it. So there was a kind of a marriage of convenience at this exact moment, where the Republican leadership didn't want to daylight a vote, a vote that they knew would pass.

So I'm hopeful that the pressure will be off politically later this year, and people will allow the Chamber of Commerce, the Evangelical community, the immigrant rights community, all of these folks – labor – who often aren't with each other to have their day, to be able to be represented in Congress. Those are traditionally Republican groups in some cases. We deserve a vote on this. I hope the Republican leadership will allow it.

HOBSON: We're speaking with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. A lot more to get to. We will continue our conversation in a moment, HERE AND NOW.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

ROBIN YOUNG, HOST:

It's HERE AND NOW, and if you've just joined us, Jeremy is in Southern California at NPR West. He's been talking with L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti. Let's get back to that.

HOBSON: Mayor Garcetti, one of the issues that you have focused on since you've been mayor is trying to keep Hollywood, if you will, in Hollywood. And I wonder how worried you are that filmmakers are moving to other states. They're going to places where they can get these tax incentives to do their work.

GARCETTI: Well, production isn't running away; it has run away already. And that's very troubling for an industry that was born here, that's still our signature industry in many ways. But I'm quite optimistic that we've changed the debate here in California, that people realize that by expanding our tax credits, which pay themselves back, by the way, in the way that they're designed here, so we don't take that money out of schools or roads or cops, that if we just grow the pool available to be reimbursed, like New York has done, like other places have done, people will realize L.A. and California are still overwhelming the best places to find talent, good weather, experience, that the best shoots will continue to happen here.

So by appointing a film czar for the first time from the city of L.A., we have decided that this is a fight we have to be in the middle of. We can't just rely on history to assume people will continue to film here. And those great middle-class jobs, our export to the world, our signature industry, should be able to grow here in the coming years if we get that through.

HOBSON: Does that mean offering the same kinds of tax incentives that people can get other places?

GARCETTI: No, we don't need to be as cheap as other places because our talent is better, our weather is better, our experience is better, our infrastructure is stronger. We already have a well-designed tax credit in the state, which is a 20-percent credit, which is lower than other states. But every producer I've talked to said if there were just more of that 20 percent available, I would film in L.A., I would film in California.

So we're going to try to convince the state legislature and Governor Brown to sign an expansion of those tax credits to a higher level and bring those productions home.

HOBSON: You brought up the weather many times, and I don't think anybody would argue that L.A. has fantastic weather. However, you are right now in the middle of a serious drought. How worried are you right now? I know there has been rain in recent weeks, but how would you assess the state of the drought at the moment?

GARCETTI: For the city of Los Angeles, I'm very focused by not worried. I'll tell you why. I'm focused because if this goes on, we're going to have to continue to apply new policies, water rationing, changing our landscaping, doing things that will preserve water. But I'm not worried right now

because Los Angeles has done a really good job preparing for this.

We consume the same amount of water today that we did 30 years ago with a million more residents, primarily because of low-flow toilets, aerators on our faucets, things that right now the city of L.A. will pay L.A. residents to change out. We pay people to actually take their grass up from their lawns and put in more California-tolerant plants.

Those things, including trying to recycle our water, the water that we wash out to the ocean every single day, putting that back into our aquifers and our wells is where I'm focused because we've got to end our dependence on what I call foreign water from the city of Los Angeles.

If we do those things, we can weather even this tough, tough drought. We've shown the ability to do it before, and we're creating a lot of green jobs. People from around the world are coming to see how L.A. has been able to manage this so well. The state of California, other parts, it's going to be much tougher. But L.A. is in a good position.

HOBSON: When we interviewed Governor Brown yesterday, he talked about this very thing, about whether people should have lawns in front and back of their yards and that perhaps people in Southern California, especially, ought to think about putting in cacti rather than having front yards. Would you say it's a good idea for your residents to stop having lawns that they have to water?

GARCETTI: Well absolutely. I mean, where they have lawns that you play on and use a lot, you know, go for it. But most of those lawns just sit empty. And there's great landscaping that's somewhere between a cactus and a lawn that's beautiful, that has succulents that bloom, that have flowers, that looks gorgeous in a home. And I think working with a lot of people, people have realized they can make their homes look even more attractive than they are today and cut down their water bills and help us long-term.

HOBSON: Is drought the number one concern of yours when it comes to climate change and its effect on Los Angeles?

GARCETTI: Absolutely. I serve on President Obama's Climate Change Task Force. Governor Brown and I hosted the second meeting of that out in Los Angeles. And that's really what we're feeling the effects of and how the drought continues to be the result of changed ocean temperature, we think. And that's probably, you know, something that regardless if it's coming from climate change or not is going to be with us for the next coming years.

We need to change our relationship with water. About half the water we have we waste and we wash out to the ocean. So this isn't a problem of population overgrowth, not having enough water. It's how we treat our water and how we waste it.

HOBSON: What city do you look to for ideas?

GARCETTI: You know, I look all over the place. I looked at Denver, and, you know, when Governor, then-Mayor Hickenlooper was there. There's great stuff. I look to New York City and to Mayor Bloomberg and talk to my friend Bill de Blasio. I've brought together 16 mayors who were elected last year from Boston, looking at Minnesota, Minneapolis; Pittsburgh.

There's a whole new generation, Mayor Fulop in Jersey City, of us that are talking to each other. I've always said mayors are great thieves. We hear a good idea one place, and we want to steal it for our city. I'm on the phone with international mayors, too, like Mayor Pais(ph) in Buenos Aires, who heads up the C40, which is a group of cities committing to reduce our global greenhouse gases and reducing the impact of climate change.

And I really think mayors are getting the job done worldwide. Cities are the place of innovation. There's a great book out called "What If Mayors Ruled the World." And besides it being self-serving, it's a great book that I have on my bedside because it really shows how the national level of politics is broken not just in the United States but many places. And people are looking to mayors as executives who deal with problems and get things done.

HOBSON: Did you see the movie "Her"?

GARCETTI: I have not yet seen "Her."

HOBSON: But you know that it portrays Los Angeles using images of Shanghai.

GARCETTI: Absolutely.

HOBSON: So that's my question. Is that what L.A. of the future is going to look like, do you think, skyscrapers, public transit, very dense?

GARCETTI: I don't think it'll be ever very dense like that, but a lot of people don't realize we're already the densest metropolitan area in the United States. We just smash it down instead of build it up. I think increasingly you will have some more vertical buildings because it's actually – it provides more open spaces and view corridors.

But L.A. is changing its narrative. I think we will be a place of public transportation. We have the biggest public transit infrastructure construction project in this country. I'm bringing rail to the airport for the first time, and we're rebuilding our airport. So a lot of the cliches about L.A. 20 years from now will be very different.

It'll still be the most creative spot on the face of the Earth, the place with the best weather in the world. But the city itself I think will function a lot better than it has when people saw earthquakes, traffic and riots in the '80s and '90s. We're really poised for great things.

HOBSON: All right, one more question before I let you go, and I – you can make some news here if you want, but in 2018, looking forward, you're going to have two opportunities. You could either run for governor of California, or you could

run for the Senate in California. Which of those jobs would you rather have?

GARCETTI: Well, you know, President Clinton once said the two best jobs in politics are president of the United States and mayor of a big city. I can't imagine a better job than the one that I have right now. I never look a step ahead. I've been here for nine months, and I want to do some big things here before I even think about that.

California is an amazing state, and I love it. I love being a chief executive. But I'm very focused on doing that here in L.A. Let's rebuild a big city and take it from there.

HOBSON: Let the record show that I didn't actually expect you to answer that question.

(LAUGHTER)

GARCETTI: But I wasn't being coy. It was honest. I love this job, and I can't imagine a better one.

HOBSON: Eric Garcetti, mayor of the great city of Los Angeles. Thank you so much.

GARCETTI: Thank you, I appreciate it.

HOBSON: And I have to say as I've been driving around Los Angeles, Robin, there are a lot more developments, a lot of new condo buildings going up even since I lived here, which was just a few years ago, a lot of development. We also heard the mayor talk about the city he looks to for ideas as Denver. That is the same answer that the mayor of Phoenix, Greg Stanton, gave us when we talked to him.

YOUNG: We've done some stories on that. Denver Water, for instance, the utility, they are considered leaders in looking to incorporating climate change into their planning. They work with climate scientists, something you'd think would be being done around the country, but apparently Denver is a real leader there.

HOBSON: Well listeners at Colorado Public Radio, do you agree with that, that Denver is a model? Let us know at hereandnow.org. This is HERE AND NOW. Transcript provided by NPR, Copyright NPR.

Klobuchar Seeking Fix For USCIS Office Move

By Mark Brunswick, Star Tribune

[Minneapolis Star Tribune](#), March 19, 2014

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar continues to pursue a fix to what even the federal government admits is a \$14 million mistake.

Last week she pressed the nominee to head the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to address a planned move of its Minnesota office from near the Mall of America to an out-of-the-way location on the Bloomington-Eden Prairie border, 3 miles from the closest public transportation.

The exchange occurred with Leon Rodriguez during a Senate confirmation hearing. Rodriguez has been nominated to be director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

With little local public input and because of a mistake that even it acknowledges, the federal government will move its USCIS offices 11 miles away later this year.

In violation of its own policies that require easy access to public transportation, the new building will be 3 miles from the closest bus stop. The federal General Services Administration has admitted it misread a bus schedule in reviewing applications.

The Minnesota office serves all of the state as well as the Dakotas and a large swath of western Wisconsin. Last year it saw about 28,000 people who scheduled interviews, used its information center or came to pick up citizenship certificates. It processed more than 13,000 applications for naturalization in 2013.

"Obviously a lot of people who use this service do not use cars and are not able to afford cabs," Klobuchar told Rodriguez. "The worst part about it, I like that they told the truth, but the GSA admitted they made a mistake. It is a glaring error. It is a huge problem."

Rodriguez, the director of the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services, said he was aware of the problem and was committed to finding a resolution.

"In my current job, the work we do is all about accessibility to government services, so this is really core to my professional identity to tackle these sorts of issues," Rodriguez testified.

US COAST GUARD

Coast Guard Ends Search For Suspected Missing Diver Off Molokai

[KITV-TV Honolulu](#), March 20, 2014

The Coast Guard ended its search Wednesday evening for a possible missing diver approximately five miles south of the Molokai airport.

The diver stated that he and his son had lost the buoy while diving near Lahaina on Sunday.

Watchstanders at Coast Guard Sector Honolulu received notification from the tug American Contender, who reported an orange dive flag and buoy with a taut line approximately five miles offshore.

The American Contender monitored the area, but no one appeared to be in distress in the immediate area.

An MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew from Coast Guard Air Station Barbers Point was launched to the scene to search for anyone in distress.

The MH-65 helicopter crew recovered the dive buoy and discovered it was marked with a few stickers and the initials 'Lt' handwritten with a white paint pen. A bag of seashells was also attached to the dive buoy.

The Coast Guard advises the public to label all watercraft and equipment with contact information in order to quickly account for owners and prevent any unnecessary searches.

Through the Operation Paddle Smart program, the Coast Guard offers a free "If Found" decal to be placed in a visible location on watercraft. The information on the sticker can allow response entities to quickly identify the vessel's owner and aid in search and rescue planners in determining the best course of action.

The stickers can be obtained for free at local harbor masters, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, from Honolulu Sail and Power Squadron offices and at select marine retail and supply stores.

PHOTOS: Dive buoy recovered off of Molokai

1 of 4

The Coast Guard found a orange dive flag with a buoy on Wednesday with the initials "Lt" on the buoy about 5 miles offshore of Molokai Airport.

[Click here to see more pictures of the dive buoy and flag.](#)

Coast Guard Evacuates Man From Cruise Ship

[Wilmington \(NC\) Star News](#), March 20, 2014

A 66-year-old man was medically evacuated Wednesday from a cruise ship about 50 miles off the coast of Wilmington, according to a U.S. Coast Guard news release.

The Coast Guard's Fifth District Command Center received word about 10:45 p.m. Tuesday that the man was in "medical distress" aboard the 950-foot cruise ship Carnival Splendor, the release states.

A Coast Guard helicopter crew from Air Station Elizabeth City was sent to the scene and at about 1:30 a.m. Wednesday, the man was airlifted from the cruise ship and then transferred to an ambulance at Wilmington International Airport, the release states.

The man was listed in stable condition at New Hanover Regional Medical Center, according to the Coast Guard.

His name was not released.

— F.T. Norton

Coast Guard Evacuates Man From Cruise Ship Off N.C.

By C.K. Hickey

[Hampton Roads \(VA\) Virginian-Pilot](#), March 20, 2014

The Coast Guard on Wednesday evacuated a man with a medical emergency off a cruise ship about 50 miles east of Wilmington, N.C.

The Coast Guard received a radio call from the Carnival Splendor around 10:45 p.m. Tuesday that the man, 66, was in medical distress. Crews arrived at the Splendor around 1:30 a.m. Wednesday with an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter launched from Elizabeth City.

The man was transported to New Hanover Regional Medical Center in stable condition.

The 950-foot Carnival Splendor is en route from New York to the Bahamas.

Coast Guard Names Crewmember Who Died From 'Serious Illness'

[KTUU-TV Anchorage \(AK\)](#), March 20, 2014

The U.S. Coast Guard has released the name of the Dutch Harbor crewmember who died Tuesday after becoming "seriously ill" just a day prior.

Coast Guard Petty Officer Shawn Eggert said Wednesday that the man has been identified as Petty Officer Second Class Michal Marciniak.

According to the Coast Guard's timeline of events, Marciniak sought treatment at an Unalaska clinic just after 2 a.m. Monday. He was diagnosed with a "serious illness" and was eventually medevaced to Anchorage by 10 a.m.

Marciniak received treatment at Alaska Regional Hospital until he died Tuesday morning around 6:40 a.m.

Marciniak was 30 years old and a native of Oak Lawn, Illinois. Eggert said he joined the Coast Guard in October 2007. He had been stationed in Alaska since May 2013, working with the Marine Safety Detachment in Dutch Harbor.

Eggert said Marciniak's work involved safety examinations on fishing vessels and attending to pollution aboard vessels. The Coast Guard said Tuesday they do not believe his fatal illness was related to his work or any materials he may have come in contact with while on duty.

The Coast Guard will not release information on the man's medical condition, symptoms, or cause of death until an autopsy is completed.

Marciniak's illness and death remain under investigation.

Coast Guard Responding To Industrial Oil Spill In Georgetown

By Larry Collins

[WCBF-TV Charleston \(SC\)](#), March 20, 2014

The US Coast Guard is responding to an industrial oil spill on the Sampit River in Downtown Georgetown.

"Coast Guard Sector Charleston received notification of an unknown sheen at approximately 4 p.m. Wednesday after the National Response Center relayed the report from a business along the Sampit River in Downtown Georgetown," USCG representative Marilyn Fajardo said in a press release.

Officials say the Georgetown Coast Guard station launched a small boat crew to investigate and after arriving on-scene, determined the ArcelorMittal Steel Mill as the responsible party.

"The ArcelorMittal Steel Mill is investigating the cause of the spill. HEPACO, an oil spill response organization, has

been contracted to conduct clean-up operations," Fajardo said.

Coast Guard Sector Charleston is assisting and will remain on-scene to verify safe and thorough cleanup operations.

SECRET SERVICE

Police Discover Counterfeit Traveler's Check Scam

By Rick Kambic

[Vernon Hills \(IL\) Review](#), March 20, 2014

Four people from the East Coast were arrested after a shoplifting investigation uncovered the use of counterfeit traveler's checks at three Vernon Hills businesses.

Sheryl J. Smith, 20, of 704 E. 74th St., Brooklyn, N.Y., was allegedly seen concealing a bottle of perfume on Feb. 27 while at Kohl's, 235 N. Milwaukee Ave. Police say after Smith was apprehended, an subsequent search discovered counterfeit American Express traveler's checks.

Police spokesman Kim Christenson said those checks were similar to ones three other people used when also buying merchandise from Kohl's. Christenson said the four suspects were allegedly buying items with \$100 counterfeit checks and then returning the items for cash.

Smith was ultimately charged with forgery, retail theft, identity theft, theft, burglary and possession of marijuana.

Alpacheta D. Cole, 19, of 40 W. 115th St., New York, N.Y., was later found and charged with forgery, burglary and theft; Terrance H. Pringle, 32, of 855 Washington Post Road lot 207, New Bern, N.C., was later found and charged with forgery, burglary and theft; Brent Charles, 25, of 605 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. was later found and charged with possessing a fraudulent driver's license, forgery, burglary and theft.

Christenson said more than a dozen counterfeit \$100 checks were passed between Kohl's and the other two stores in town. Vernon Hills assigned six tactical officers and detectives to the case, which reportedly involved a considerable amount of evidence inventory and tracking.

"This was a very complex investigation," Police Chief Mark Fleischhauer said. "There was great teamwork among officers, investigators and the U.S. Secret Service."

All four suspects are still in the Lake County jail awaiting trial. Smith, Cole and Charles were scheduled in court March 17, while Pringle is scheduled in court March 24.

Christenson said he's still unaware of why the four suspects are in Illinois. No other nearby municipalities are investigating the group, but Christenson said the Secret Service still has its own ongoing case.

Police Investigate Fake Federal Agent On MBTA

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

BOSTON — The U.S. Secret Service and Massachusetts transit police are looking for a man they say claimed to be a Secret Service agent to avoid paying a commuter rail fare.

A verbal confrontation last week between the man and a conductor was caught on video by another passenger.

The man says “You don’t mess with the Secret Service,” then later says “Don’t interrupt my investigation, all right, tough guy? What do you work for, al-Qaida?”

Police did not say on which MBTA commuter line the confrontation occurred.

The real Secret Service and MBTA police say they are confident the man was not a real agent.

Impersonating a federal officer is a felony punishable by up to three years in prison and a \$1,000 fine.

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Authorities Hunt Fake Secret Service Agent

By Antonio Planas

[Boston Herald](#), March 20, 2014

Federal and local authorities are seeking a suspect who allegedly impersonated a Secret Service agent while aboard the T.

“We’re aware of this incident,” Stephen Marks, acting special agent in charge with Boston’s Secret Service Office and spokesman for the federal agency. “We’re investigating it. We take it very seriously and we’re working with our state and local partners including the MBTA.”

There have been no arrests, Marks said. Impersonating a federal officer is a felony.

Citing an ongoing investigation, Marks declined to disclose when and aboard which T line the alleged incident occurred.

NATIONAL PROTECTION AND PROGRAMS

Could Our Food Supply Be A Target For Terrorists?

By Luke Runyon

[NPR](#), March 20, 2014

It sounds like the plot of a Hollywood blockbuster: Villains bent on chaos set their sights on a food company — an easy target — with plans to lace its products with a chemical or pathogen. The hero finds out in time to save the day.

Sound far-fetched? Not according to U.S. regulators who have been pondering such scenarios.

Under new proposed rules from the Food and Drug Administration, food processors and manufacturers — both domestic and companies abroad that ship food to the U.S. — would need to take steps to mitigate a potential terrorist attack.

Few documented incidents of malicious food contamination exist, though, which raises the question: Is food terrorism fact or fiction?

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, the U.S. government spent years, and billions of dollars, fortifying various industries against possible terrorist attacks. And since then, the United States has seen its fair share of terrorist attacks, including the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

While the food system has remained relatively untouched, “we’ve certainly studied it since 9/11 to assess what the potential impacts might be,” says Don Kraemer, deputy director of the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. “And they can be catastrophic,” he says.

The FDA rules focus on weak links in food processing and manufacturing in an attempt to ferret out where the vulnerabilities exist.

The rules mostly apply to facilities in charge of bulk storage or handling of liquids for human consumption — think dairy plants where milk is stored in big vats. Another area of concern? Facilities like large, industrial bakeries where lots of ingredients are mixed together.

“A lot of food processing manufacturers don’t practice rigid biosecurity,” says Peter Chalk, a terrorism analyst with the Rand Corp., a policy think tank.

Many food companies fail to take even the most basic precaution, he says. Owners don’t padlock warehouses or engage in sufficient surveillance. Or they hire a lot of transient workers without performing background checks.

“So actually, introducing a contaminant — salmonella, botulism, mercury — into the food chain would not be particularly difficult,” Chalk says.

The weak links, though, haven’t really been tested. The last big bioterrorist attack in the U.S. happened in 1984 in The Dalles, Ore. That’s when members of a cult infected salad bars with salmonella; more than 700 people were sickened. Since then, the American food system has grappled more with unintentional outbreaks, like the listeria-laden cantaloupe that killed 33 people in 2011.

Would the FDA’s proposed rules keep us safe? Chalk says the vulnerabilities go well beyond what’s covered in the proposal.

Producers could be at risk as well, he says. It would be relatively easy to deal a devastating blow to the country’s livestock industry with a virus in a vial. An act of agroterrorism like that keeps some food experts up at night.

If a terrorist wanted to deal a devastating economic blow to the U.S., all it would take is a calculated release of foot-and-mouth disease on the nation's livestock. Unintentional outbreaks in Europe and South America have haunted economies there, as trade is shut down and whole herds are culled to quarantine the disease.

The impact of a deliberate outbreak in the U.S. could be huge. One risk assessment from the Department of Homeland Security found that if a pathogen like foot-and-mouth disease were let loose among Great Plains ranchers, total damages could exceed \$50 billion. Exports and trade could be cut off, and consumer demand would very likely take a huge hit.

When U.S. troops raided an al-Qaida storehouse in Afghanistan in 2002, they found documents detailing ways to attack American agriculture to deal a blow to the U.S. economy. Still, no attack has materialized in the 12 years since.

"Agriculture is critical infrastructure in a country," says Keith Roehr, Colorado's state veterinarian. "How would we eradicate the disease? We don't know. ... We know there would be steps we would take. Do we know exactly what these would be? No, we don't."

Yet few livestock owners consider their operations targets of terrorism, Roehr says. And that mindset could leave them vulnerable.

Experts suspect that the bigger reason the U.S. has avoided a large-scale attack on food and farms is that an attack like that doesn't carry the same weight as a suicide bombing or mass shooting.

"It lacks a visible point for the media to latch on to, [except for] the possible images of burning cows," Chalk says. "Really, it doesn't have the same blood lust appeal of carrying out a suicide attack in a shopping mall."

Still, it's a risk that government regulators want the food industry to consider more seriously, in case what seems like a grisly fiction turns into reality.

Al-Qaida Calls For Car Bombs Across America

By Jordain Carney

[National Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Al-Qaida is using the latest edition of its magazine to call for car bombs across the United States and other "crusader countries."

The Spring 2014 edition of Inspire details how to build a bomb and suggests the best way to plan and execute a successful attack.

Unsurprisingly, the magazine notes that "America is our first target," and it recommends Washington (specifically restaurants and bars on M Street), Northern Virginia (including Arlington and Alexandria), Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles as specific targets.

In addition, it notes that a potential terrorist should look for places "flooded with individuals," including sports events—specifically the U.S. Open tennis tournament, campaign events, festivals, and holiday gatherings on Christmas, New Year's Eve, or New Year's Day.

"The important thing is that you target people and not buildings," notes the article, located in the magazine's "Open Source Jihad" section.

And with the Boston Marathon coming up next month, the article strikes a soberingly familiar note with a recipe on how to build a bomb using a pressure cooker—the type used in the April 2013 attack.

Top defense and Homeland Security officials have warned about an increasing risk from individuals who work alone to plan or carry out a terrorist attack without direct instructions from a terrorist organization.

DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson said last month that the Boston Marathon bombing could be "a sign of the future" and that terrorist threats from so-called "lone wolf" or "self-radicalized" terrorists are in many ways harder to detect.

DHS didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the magazine article.

Al Qaida Magazine Shows Times Square As A Target

By Lisa Evers

[WNYW-TV New York](#), March 20, 2014

The spring issue of the al Qaida produced "Inspire" magazine is out, complete with directions on how to build a devastating car bomb without getting caught. Law enforcement officials say it is a propaganda tool that played a role in last year's Boston Marathon bombing. That's just one reason why the NYPD is taking it seriously, Police Commissioner William Bratton said.

"Among the photos and encouragement of where to attack there's a photo of Times Square, 47th and Broadway," Bratton said.

The Times Square area, often called the "Crossroads of the World" has been an obsession of potential terrorists, as we saw in May 2010 with the attempted car bombing.

Former FBI Agent Jonathan Gilliam told me the site remains in the terrorists' crosshairs.

Times Square draws tens of thousands of pedestrians, and has chaotic and crowded traffic routes right through it. Gilliam said while he respects the NYPD, it's time for them to more fully secure the area by limiting vehicle access before it's too late.

Bratton said his predecessor, Ray Kelly, has an excellent track record of preventing more than a dozen terror plots. It's a record he said he intends to keep building.

NYPD: Al-Qaida Magazine Encourages Car Bomb Attacks In NYC

By KEVIN DEUTSCH AND ANTHONY M. DESTEFANO

[Newsday](#), March 20, 2014

The latest issue of al-Qaida's Inspire magazine urges lone-wolf terrorists to detonate car bombs in New York City and includes a photo of Times Square, police officials said.

The spring edition of the Internet-based, Western-aimed propaganda magazine, which officials say inspired the Boston Marathon bombers, contains instructions on how to build larger, more powerful car bombs than used in the past.

"The new edition of Inspire has instructions on a new larger device, if I understand it correctly," NYPD Commissioner William Bratton said Wednesday at a Police Athletic League function. "And among the photos and the encouragement of where to attack there is a photo of Times Square, 47th and Broadway."

One section – headlined "Car Bombs Inside America" – encourages jihadists to plant bombs at large public gatherings such as sporting events and political rallies. America is listed as the primary target, but attacks on Great Britain, France and other "crusading" countries are also encouraged.

"It certainly is an issue we'll continue to stay focused on," Bratton said.

Construction of the pressure-cooker bombs used in the April 15 blasts at the finish line of the Boston Marathon appeared to follow step-by-step instructions found in an earlier edition of Inspire, which included the article "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom."

The marathon bombings were the most significant terror attack – or attempt – since Pakistani immigrant Faisal Shahzad parked an explosives-laden sport utility vehicle in Times Square on May 1, 2010. Alert street vendors spotted smoke spewing from his vehicle and police disabled the bomb, which was also inside a pressure cooker. He was sentenced to life in prison.

Shahzad's example is cited in the latest Inspire issue, which also mentions Willis Tower in Chicago and military facilities in Virginia as potential targets.

Last month, accused homegrown jihadist Jose Pimentel pleaded guilty to a terrorism charge in federal court in Manhattan shortly before the Washington Heights resident was slated to go to trial. Authorities said he built pipe bombs targeted for New York City.

"We operate on a near permanent state of alert," John Miller, the NYPD's deputy commissioner for intelligence, said in an email. "Each day, we evaluate risk and deploy resources to high-profile places or sensitive locations based on intelligence streams and world events. We will factor what we're seeing in Inspire to that matrix." Inspire is the brainchild

of al-Qaida propagandist Al-Samir Khan, 25, formerly of Westbury, who became radicalized after 9/11 while an East Meadow school district high school student. He later moved to Yemen, where he was killed by an American drone in September 2011.

Al Qaeda Calls For Car-bomb Attacks On U.S. Cities In Inspire Magazine

By Amanda Cochran

[CBS News](#), March 20, 2014

In the newest edition of its online magazine, Inspire, al Qaeda is calling on its followers within the United States to attack American cities with car bombs.

The publication, known as "the Vanity Fair of terrorism," lists major events and specific neighborhoods it wants targeted. Former CBS News senior correspondent John Miller, now New York City's deputy police commissioner for intelligence, said the edition is the "one-stop shopping issue for an amateur terrorist."

"What it talks about is targeting New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, specific places, specific targets, specific events, but it goes beyond that call, and it says, 'and by the way, here is a simple set of instructions for a car bomb that you can make with essentially, you know, a trip to a big box hardware store and a couple of chemicals,'" he said.

"It talks about well-known figures in terrorism," Miller continued. "It has some kind of hero worship for people who have either been captured or killed, but it also has these practical instructions ... and the most famous article was How to Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom. This became the recipe used by Jose Pimentel, who targeted military locations in New York City who pled guilty to those charges based on an Intelligence Bureau investigation a couple of weeks ago. It is also, notably, the place where they got the recipe for the pressure cooker bombs used in the Boston Marathon."

So what does the magazine's content say about al Qaeda and the people they're looking to recruit?

The issue can be read a couple of ways, according to Miller.

"One way, you can read Inspire magazine as some kind of sign of failure, which is al Qaeda central has now diminished to the point that it has to put out this wide net and say, 'Can anybody do anything because as an organization we're not effective that way,'" he said.

"Or you can flip that coin and say, they've now gone from being an effective terrorist organization to being a narrative that gets out to millions of people," Miller said. "The Boston Marathon bombers, Jose Pimentel – you can pick your person who has been picked up in one of these plots – usually never made contact with al Qaeda, but many of them got their plans and plots from Inspire magazine."

To combat threats, Miller said the NYPD and others use a number of programs aimed at their targets.

"We have the critical response vehicles, which we will use the intelligence to post at sensitive locations around the city, depending on what the intelligence stream is telling us that day," he said. "We have the Hercules teams, which are heavily armed groups, which we'll deploy at high-profile locations with no notice. It's the kind of thing that will keep somebody trying to make a plan off balance, but it also relies on the intelligence and a little bit of luck."

For more with John Miller, watch his full "CTM" appearance in the video above.

Major Departments Seek Continuous Monitoring Acquisition Independence From DHS

By David Perera

[FierceGovernmentIT](#), March 20, 2014

Some federal agencies are choosing to buy continuous monitoring tools independently of the Homeland Security Department's Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation Program despite forfeiting DHS procurement money for those tools when doing so.

Those agencies have sought and received a "delegation of procurement authority" from the CDM program. That means they are able to use the blanket purchase agreements for security tools set up by GSA for the CDM program. But, if they exercise the delegation by buying tools themselves rather than through program office, they do it "with their own money," said Jim Piché, a GSA acquisition manager newly appointed to overseeing the blanket purchase agreements.

A GSA spokeswoman said the agency won't release a list of the agencies that received a delegation. Piché spoke Wednesday during a Washington, D.C. industry-sponsored panel on the program.

An industry source said agencies with a delegation include the departments of Agriculture, Homeland Security, Justice and Veterans Affairs.

Under the Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation program, DHS pays for agency procurements of continuous monitoring tools and an initial period of maintenance and support. The idea is for DHS, which has responsibility for security of the .gov domain, to have a real-time picture of agencies' security status through a dashboard that collects data from those tools.

Progress on the CDM program implementation has been slow amid some agency and vendor complaints about its pace and transparency, stating that delivery orders so far of \$60.4 million amount to far less than the annualized pace of \$1.2 billion the program ceiling creates. CDM has a \$6 billion ceiling over five years.

An industry source said GSA recently told vendors they're unable to update their technology offerings on the CDM blanket purchase agreement without first making an approved contract modification to their underlying schedule contract with GSA, reversing what some companies had been earlier told. The schedule modification process can be time-consuming, since it requires GSA to review new offerings for pricing fairness.

GSA did, however, award earlier this month a contract to a Texas-based joint venture known as Metrica Team Venture for the governmentwide dashboard that will aggregate continuous monitoring data in an effort to give DHS and agencies a real-time picture of their security status.

The dashboard should change federal management of cybersecurity to adopt a more mission-risk based approach, said Jeff Eisensmith, DHS chief information security officer. The security status data displayed on the dashboards should be used by an operational boards composed of mission owners – not just information technology workers, Eisensmith said during the panel.

"As things pop up...the operational risk management board conveys to say 'What does this mean from a risk perspective – not security risk, but mission risk,'" he said.

Eisensmith also told the assembled audience of federal officials and industry representatives that he loathes the traditional, paper- and compliance-based execution of agency cybersecurity oversight. "I actually throw up a little in my mouth," he said.

DIRECTORATE FOR MANAGEMENT

Chaffetz, Goodlatte, Issa And Gowdy Demand DHS To Come Clean On Libya Policy Reversal

By Shane Goldmacher

[National Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Washington, D.C. – House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), Immigration and Border Security Subcommittee Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.), and National Security Subcommittee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) today sent a follow up letter to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Jeh Johnson demanding information about the Obama Administration's misguided and dangerous plan to lift a longstanding prohibition on Libyans coming to the U.S. to attend flight school, to work in aviation maintenance or flight operations, or to study or seek training in nuclear science.

After the House Judiciary Committee obtained an internal draft final regulation from a DHS source that outlines the Obama Administration's proposal to change its policy towards Libya, Chairman Goodlatte and Congressman Chaffetz wrote to then-DHS Acting Secretary Rand Beers last

November about this proposed policy. However, to date the Department has failed to respond and has moved forward with this proposed policy without disclosing information about it to Congress. The letter sent today states that the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee's Subcommittee on National Security will convene a joint hearing on this issue in the immediate future.

Below are excerpts from the letter. To read the entire letter, [click here](#).

"We write this letter as a follow up to a letter sent on November 25, 2013 ... We raised concerns [about the Administration's proposed policy], as, clearly, the U.S. relationship with Libya is anything but normal, as evidenced by the September 11 thassault on the U.S. compound in Benghazi, Libya and horrific murder of our ambassador to that country over year ago. Not only did four Americans die on that date, but, as we previously documented, numerous other terror threats have continued from Libya in recent months.

"Since November 25, 2013, House Judiciary Committee staff has contacted DHS over half a dozen times to determine the status of our inquiry ... According to [a DHS memo], you expect 'the Department to respond to Congress in a direct, courteous, and timely manner' ... Yet the letter we sent to DHS remains unanswered ... Of even greater concern, we have learned that DHS already has moved forward with this regulation and sent it to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review. DHS moved forward with the rule after we requested and did not receive information from DHS ... While this rule is in the final stages of review prior to publication, the Administration continues to ignore Congressional inquiries.

"In light of the continued national security threat to America, we find the planned policy reversal to be dangerous and irresponsible. The decision to lift the ban on allowing nationals of such a terror-plagued country to come to the U.S. to engage in flight-related training is particularly disturbing in light of the role such training played in the preparations for the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Further, lifting the ban on Libyan nationals to come to the U.S. to study nuclear science and related fields is incomprehensible in light of the peril the U.S. and its allies in the Near East face from the potential acquisition of nuclear weapons technology by terrorists or hostile nations in the region.

"We will convene a joint hearing between the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee's Subcommittee on National Security in the immediate future to determine the status of the rule and the impetus behind it. DHS will be called to testify in order to respond to Congress since it has failed to do so as of the date of this letter."

TERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS

Son-In-Law, In Testimony, Recounts Cave Meeting With Bin Laden

By Benjamin Weiser

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

In the days and weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks, Sulaiman Abu Ghaith served as a spokesman for Osama bin Laden, amplifying some of the Al Qaeda leader's pronouncements, and giving voice, prosecutors say, to a broad recruitment drive for fighters committed to wage war on the United States.

On Wednesday, Mr. Abu Ghaith gave voice to his own cause, unexpectedly taking the stand in a federal courtroom in Manhattan, defending himself against charges that include conspiring to kill Americans and providing material support for terrorists.

Mr. Abu Ghaith is the most senior Bin Laden adviser to be tried — let alone testify — in a civilian court in the United States since the attacks, and he offered an extraordinarily intimate look at Bin Laden at the time of the attacks, taking jurors inside his cave in Afghanistan.

Mr. Abu Ghaith, a 48-year-old Kuwaiti-born cleric, said he was summoned by the Qaeda leader on the night of the Sept. 11 attacks. "I found him in the cave, inside a mountain, in a rough terrain," Mr. Abu Ghaith testified.

"He said, 'Come in, sit down.' He said, 'Did you learn about what happened?'"

Bin Laden wanted his opinion on what would happen next, Mr. Abu Ghaith recalled on the stand. He said he told the Qaeda leader that he was not a "military analyst," but Bin Laden pressed him.

Mr. Abu Ghaith said he told Bin Laden that if it were "proven that you were the one that did this," the United States would not stop until it accomplished two things: killed Bin Laden and toppled the Taliban state.

"He said, 'You are being too pessimistic.' I said, 'You asked my opinion, and this is my opinion,'" Mr. Abu Ghaith testified.

Mr. Abu Ghaith would then make videotaped speeches the next day and in later weeks, in which he praised the attacks and warned of others; he said those speeches were based on talking points from Bin Laden.

Asked by his lawyer, Stanley L. Cohen, whether he had ever taken part in any plan to kill Americans or anyone else, Mr. Abu Ghaith said no.

His decision to testify will give federal prosecutors a rare chance to cross-examine someone who was so close to Bin Laden; most accused terrorists agree to plea deals before trial, and those who do not invariably refuse to testify.

Mr. Abu Ghaith has told federal agents that he and Bin Laden had a "personal agreement" that Mr. Abu Ghaith would

“do anything he could within his capabilities as a religious scholar and experienced orator to assist” Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, according to an F.B.I. summary of his interrogation aboard the airplane that brought him to the United States last year.

In the statement, he denied any knowledge or involvement in terrorist plots, planned or executed.

Mr. Abu Ghaith said that he often quoted Al Qaeda’s statements but did not feel that he was talking “on behalf of Al Qaeda.” He said Bin Laden had not asked him to become a spokesman and that there was no such position at the time.

Mr. Abu Ghaith’s testimony is expected to continue Wednesday afternoon.

Until he took the stand, Mr. Abu Ghaith’s lawyers gave no indication that they were going to have their client testify. The defense’s strategy had been to obtain the testimony of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the self-described architect of the Sept. 11 attacks; the defense had argued that testimony from Mr. Mohammed, given his vast knowledge of Al Qaeda’s operations, would help clear their client.

But the judge presiding over the case, Lewis A. Kaplan of Federal District Court, would not allow Mr. Mohammed’s testimony, ruling on Tuesday that there had been no showing by the defense, with some rare exceptions, that Mr. Mohammed “has personal knowledge of anything important to this matter.”

Mr. Abu Ghaith testified on Wednesday that he had met Mr. Mohammed but that they had engaged only in “casual talk.” He denied that he and Mr. Mohammed had ever discussed terrorist plots.

Prosecutors have not accused Mr. Abu Ghaith of helping to plan or carry out the Sept. 11 attacks. But prosecutors have said that Mr. Abu Ghaith knew of the Qaeda plot in which Richard C. Reid tried to blow up a trans-Atlantic airplane with explosives in his shoes.

Mr. Abu Ghaith appeared with Bin Laden in videos after Sept. 11, and made speeches in which he praised the attacks and warned that the “storm of airplanes” would not abate, which prosecutors say is evidence that he had advance knowledge of the shoe-bomb plot.

Mr. Abu Ghaith, in his testimony on Wednesday, denied having any knowledge of that attack or of having met Mr. Reid.

Judge Rebukes Justice Dept. For Requesting Overly Broad Email Searches

By Matt Apuzzo

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — A federal judge has admonished the Justice Department for repeatedly requesting overly broad searches of people’s email accounts, a practice that he called “repugnant” to the Constitution.

The unusually sharp rebuke by Magistrate Judge John M. Facciola came last week in a kickback investigation involving a defense contractor. The case highlights the broad authority the government believes it has in searching email accounts, a power that gives the Justice Department potential access to a trove of personal information about anyone it investigates, even in routine criminal cases.

“The government continues to submit overly broad warrants and makes no effort to balance the law enforcement interest against the obvious expectation of privacy email account holders have in their communications,” Judge Facciola wrote.

But, he said, prosecutors must show probable cause for everything they seize, adding that Internet companies can easily search for specific emails, names and dates that are relevant to an investigation. He said he had raised similar concerns 20 times between September and December 2013. In this particular case, prosecutors wanted every email, contact, picture and transaction record associated with an account stored on Apple servers.

“The government continues to ask for all electronically stored information in email accounts, irrespective of the relevance to the investigation,” Judge Facciola said.

Government searching of email accounts predates the Obama administration, but Judge Facciola, a former state and federal prosecutor who has been reviewing warrants as a judge since 1997, said he was increasingly concerned about the breadth of government searches. He said he was also troubled by the fact that the Justice Department never said how long it planned to keep the seized data or whether it planned to destroy information that proved irrelevant to the case.

A decade ago, searches were more straightforward. If the authorities had evidence that someone was hiding drugs in a storage unit, for instance, prosecutors applied for a warrant so F.B.I. agents could open the unit, look through the contents and seize any drugs they found.

The Justice Department, however, does not treat email accounts like storage units. Prosecutors asked Judge Facciola for the authority to take everything in the account and search it for evidence of wrongdoing. Even though the government would have everything, it only considered the evidence to be “seized.” The argument is similar to the Obama administration’s justification for collecting the phone records of every American: that the authorities do not know what is relevant until they have reviewed everything.

“The fact that our data is being held by third-party service providers is allowing the government to engage in fishing expeditions that they’ve never been able to conduct before,” said Nate Cardozo, a lawyer with the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

A Justice Department spokesman, Peter Carr, said prosecutors would respond to the judge in court documents,

though it was not clear whether those documents would be public. Warrant applications are typically sealed, so Judge Facciola's decision to make his ruling public offers a rare view of the process.

Investigators argue that, unlike a storage locker, an email account with all of its associated files cannot be fully searched without getting a complete copy of the account. A search of a Google email account, for example, might miss conversations held via the company's chat service, or files saved to its servers.

Judge Facciola acknowledged that other judges have reached different conclusions. In Kansas this year, a judge ruled that federal agents did not need to limit their search of a Yahoo account, as long as they only seized emails that were relevant to their case.

Magistrate judges are typically responsible for approving search warrants during investigations, before charges have been filed. Unlike most federal judges, who are nominated by the president, magistrate judges are appointed by a vote of district judges.

Judge Facciola said issuing the warrant in question would be "repugnant to the Fourth Amendment," which prohibits unlawful search and seizure.

Guantánamo Commander: 70 Percent Of Captives No Longer Locked Down

By Carol Rosenberg

[Miami Herald](#), March 20, 2014

Fewer than 40 detainees are refusing to eat or otherwise causing strife in the prison camps, the detention commander indicated Wednesday in a wide-ranging interview that described a steadily calming atmosphere after a year-long hunger strike in the prison camps.

Last April, the U.S. military put nearly every prisoner under lockdown — each captive alone inside a single cell — in a divide-and-conquer strategy to manage a hunger strike that ultimately swept up more than 100 captives.

Since then, the military has stopped reporting hunger strike statistics and steadily moved those who don't participate in the food protest to communal detention as a reward.

As of this week, Rear Admiral Richard Butler said, roughly 70 percent of Guantánamo's 154 detainees were being held in communal, medium-security detention.

With the 15 former CIA prisoners in solitary cells at a clandestine prison called Camp 7, none of them known to be hunger strikers, that leaves fewer than 40 of the long-held detainees in the possibly hunger-striking population.

Currently, Butler said, the prison tracks "up to a couple dozen detainees" as those who won't eat, have become so malnourished they require tube feedings or have related weight-loss health risks.

The prison required the captives to eat regularly — and to stop calling themselves hunger strikers — as a condition of release from lockdown. Communal captivity lets captives pray together, eat together, watch TV together and do group exercise.

"They largely tapered off and came off the hunger strike on their own, or quit stating that they were on a hunger strike, let's put it that way," he said. Communal captive means less constant contact between guards and the captives, who are largely left on their own inside their common areas with guards passing them food, watching and waiting for their requests.

Butler spoke to four Miami Herald journalists and a visiting reporter from the EFE news service in the third day of a week-long visit to Guantánamo that so far allowed only a brief glimpse of three communal captives, making it impossible to gauge the mood in the camps.

Separately, a different prison official who functions as Butler's Islamic cultural adviser estimated that since the military imposed a blackout on daily disclosures 10 to 15 captives refuse to eat on any given day.

And a pair of Navy medics who administer prisoner tube feedings described, anonymously, under new prison access rules, an atmosphere of normalcy accompanying the renourishment procedures. Hunger strikers who cooperate with the medical staff can sit together, up to five prisoners inside a "fast room," each man with a tube snaked up his nose into his stomach — requesting a Navy medic, called a corpsman, to slow or speed up the flow of a can of vanilla Ensure or nutritional supplements.

They're called "VIP feeders," said a female corpsman. And, if not fed in groups, she added, cooperative captives are allowed to play video games or watch TV while restrained in a reclining chair as they receive their nourishment.

In another sign of the improved atmosphere in the camps, some captives asked, and the military agreed, to start Spanish lessons — suggesting some are getting ready for life after Guantánamo.

Two years ago, after the U.S. sent two prisoners to resettlement in El Salvador, the detention center revealed that it had provided them with Rosetta Stone instruction in Spanish. This time, the prison is offering Spanish lessons taught by an instructor.

A government delegation from a Spanish-speaking nation visited Guantánamo several weeks ago, the admiral told reporters.

In other news:

- Butler said the military has mapped out troop rotations to run the prison on a timeline that extends after President Barack Obama leaves office. "Certainly the stated public goal is to get it shut down by the end of the year," he said.

Half of the 154 detainees are cleared for transfer, provided the State Department can find countries to safely

take them. But the admiral said, “literally, I do not have a good feel right now how the negotiations are going in terms of whether” the military would be transferring from the prison “only a handful” of prisoners “or a whole lot more.”

Meantime, he said, the Pentagon was planning to continue staffing the prison with 40 percent full-time soldiers and 60 percent Reserve and National Guard troops into 2016, and the next administration. Rotations are more easily canceled than started, he added.

- Butler said there’s no immediate danger to guards or captives at Guantánamo’s most secret prison, Camp 7. The Southcom commander, Marine Gen. John F. Kelly, recently told Congress the structure is “increasingly unsustainable.”

The problem isn’t the construction or wear-and-tear in the salt air at this base, Butler said, but the site selection — on a shifting piece of ground.

“Literally the ground’s heaving up underneath it. So it’s cracking the floor. That’s the biggest issue. So once you start cracking the floors, you start cracking the walls, then doors don’t work — things like that. That’s the issue,” he said.

“Right now it’s operational, but the fear is that any more [and] it’s going to potentially not be.”

- Butler said the Detention Center Zone had received no specific threat to prompt the high-profile presence of Humvees patrolling the Caribbean seafront compound in recent weeks.

Instead, he said, an assessment identified a nonspecific security gap — apparently discovered once cavalry units replaced infantry units as an external-security force — that had been overlooked in years of patrols in air-conditioned SUVs rather than armed vehicles.

Plus, he noted, “The cavalry is used to riding their Humvees.”

Attorney: Detroit-area Man Accused Of Supporting Terrorists Had One Lung, Asthma, ‘No Way’ He’s Joining Hizballah

By Gus Burns

[MLive](#), March 20, 2014

DETROIT, MI – A 22-year-old Dearborn Heights man remains jailed on charges he tried to fly from Detroit Metropolitan Airport to Lebanon and join

Hizballah,

a terrorist organization,

in its military support of the Syrian government.

Arthur Weiss, the attorney of the accused,

Mohammad Hassan Hamdan, says his client never intended to join the terrorist fight.

He has “medical problems, with one lung, with asthma who’s from the United States,” Weiss said during a Tuesday interview

with News/Talk 760 WJR’s Frank Beckmann.

“There’s no way on the face of the Earth that he ‘s going to be able to join Hizballah.

“It’s my understanding that he’s not particularly religious and does not get involved in the radical Muslim beliefs.”

Hamdan, according to the complaint against him, was born in Lebanon and came to the U.S. in 2007. He was currently pursuing U.S. citizenship.

Authorities on Sunday arrested Hamdan after he cleared security with a plane ticket from Detroit to Beirut, Lebanon, via Paris. The round-trip flight was set to return to Detroit from Beirut on May 3, but the Federal Bureau of Investigation claims Hamdan had no intention to return then.

Thomas S. Huse, an FBI special agent assigned to the Detroit Joint Terrorism Task Force, says a confidential informant first notified the FBI of Hamdan and his plan to return to Lebanon and join Hizballah in September of 2013.

Weiss said during the radio interview with Beckmann he hasn’t reviewed the prosecution’s evidence but Hamdan planned a round-trip flight to visit relatives in Lebanon.

Hamdan might have been sympathetic toward “the people who are being slaughtered” but any statements were made “over an adult beverage” with friends and “taken out of context,” Weiss said.

“It is one thing, to, when you’re talking with friends, maybe over an adult beverage, talking about the atrocities that are going on in the neighboring country, that people of your sect are being singled out and slaughtered, particularly children, that you might feel some affinity over the people who are being slaughtered ... “ Weiss told Beckmann. “But talking about it over an adult beverage and actually going over there and doing something is vastly different.”

A recorded conversation between Hamdan and the informant on Jan. 28 corroborated those plans, the FBI says, as well as claims by Hamdan that he, in 2006, fought with Hizballah in its military action with Israel.

The source claims Hamdan was “elated” to learn he’d be able to join Hizballah come May of 2014. However, Hamdan needed a new passport – his sister had confiscated his, concerned he’d use it to return to Lebanon – and Hamdan filed a lost-passport claim with the Dearborn Heights Police Department, also requesting a temporary replacement, the charging document claims.

Huse says Hamdan asked the FBI informant to sell his work van and give the proceeds to his sister, that he had no plans to return to the U.S.

Hamdan is expected back in the federal court in Detroit for a hearing Monday.

Fla. Man Pleads Guilty To Terrorism Charges

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) – A 20-year-old Florida man pleaded guilty Wednesday to conspiring to aid al-Qaida and

traveling to the Middle East to join terrorist groups, prosecutors said.

Shelton Thomas Bell pleaded guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists and attempting to provide material support to terrorists, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Jacksonville reported. He faces up to 30 years in prison. A sentencing date has not been set.

"Working with our law enforcement partners to prevent terrorism and promote national security is a top priority," U.S. Attorney A. Lee Bentley III said in a news release. "We are thankful that this investigation was resolved without harm or injury to any citizens, at home or abroad."

An indictment said Bell planned to join Ansar Al-Sharia, another name for al-Qaida in the Middle East region. The group has taken responsibility for attacks on Yemeni forces, including a suicide bombing during a May 2012 parade that killed more than 100 soldiers.

Bell participated in physical, firearm and other training in Florida to prepare for armed conflict, federal agents said. Bell was also accused of soliciting others to travel overseas with him to train.

In September 2012, Bell and a juvenile went to Amman, Jordan, and made contact with someone who investigators said could help them travel to Yemen to participate in violent jihad, according to the indictment. The indictment does not say whether Bell ever entered Yemen.

Bell and the juvenile were eventually deported from Jordan to the United States in November 2012, authorities said.

Bell was arrested in the Jacksonville area on state charges in January 2013. He had built a computer-repair business with a partner and opened a booth at a flea market. Bell disappeared with several computers and thousands of dollars in cash from the partner, authorities said. Police suspected Bell later sold the computers. The partner told police he had known Bell for about a year and they had an arrangement in which the partner would buy broken computers, give them to Bell to fix, and they would split the profits.

Bell was still being held in the Duval County jail in Jacksonville in July 2013 when a grand jury indicted him on the terrorism charges.

"Stopping these threats from within is the grim reality we deal with today," FBI Special Agent in Charge Michelle S. Klimt said in the release. "This case serves as a reminder that terrorist-related activities can occur anywhere. It also shows that we will use all the resources at our disposal to root out the individuals posing these threats to keep America safe."

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Jacksonville Man Wanted Jihad, Will Get Prison

By Jim Schoettler

[Florida Times-Union](#), March 19, 2014

He was ready to fight. He was ready to kill. He was ready to die.

That description of Shelton Bell by a federal prosecutor Wednesday captured the Jacksonville man's commitment to an overseas holy war he and two others trained for while seeking guidance from terrorists, including the late Osama bin Laden, court records show.

Far from his intended Yemeni battleground, Bell, 20, pleaded guilty Wednesday in federal court in Jacksonville to conspiring and attempting to provide material support to terrorists. Bell faces up to 30 years in prison when he is sentenced later this year.

Bell has been in jail since January 2013, when he was arrested on state charges not directly connected to the terrorism plot. The Sandalwood High School graduate, who made a living working on computers at a flea market booth, was indicted on the federal charges in July 2013.

A juvenile companion and a third person involved in the plot never were identified and it's unclear if those accomplices were ever charged.

Michelle Klimt, special agent in charge of the FBI's Jacksonville division, praised the investigation led by a joint terrorism task force involving her agents and a handful of other local, state and federal police agencies.

"Stopping these threats from within is the grim reality we deal with today," Klimt said. "This case serves as a reminder that terrorist-related activities can occur anywhere."

Bell's public defender declined to comment. A message left by The Times-Union at Bell's last known address in East Arlington was not returned.

Bell and his accomplices prepared for battle by watching jihadist videos, taking target practice at beer cans and ducking from imaginary drones while in Jacksonville, prosecutor Mac Heavener III said. They also planned to make recruiting films of each other fighting in the Middle East, but never reached their ultimate destination.

It's unclear what initially tipped off investigators, who built their case in part through audio and video tapes made by Bell and his accomplices of training missions in Jacksonville.

Bell also roused suspicions at the Islamic Center in Jacksonville in 2012 for discussions he was having with fellow teens about jihad and the civil war in Syria, said Parvez Ahmed, the board secretary at the Northeast Florida center.

Ahmed said the FBI agents subsequently visited the center to interview administrators and others.

Bell's plans, beginning in May 2012, included traveling to Yemen to join Ansar Al-Sharia, an alias for al-Qaida, in violence he termed a "jihad." The terrorist group has taken

responsibility for multiple attacks on Yemeni forces, including a suicide bombing during a parade in May 2012 that killed about 100 Yemeni soldiers.

Bell and the juvenile planned to get to Yemen under the ruse of first going to Israel to visit the juvenile's sick grandmother and then seek an education in the Middle East.

Heavener said Bell inspired his accomplices by viewing pictures of dead Muslims and reviewing audio and video tapes of the late Al Qaeda spokesman, Anwar al-Awlaki. Al-Awlaki, an American-born Islamic militant and terrorist recruiter, died in Yemen in a 2011 drone strike that became controversial because he was an American citizen.

Field training by Bell and his accomplices in Jacksonville included the destruction of religious statutes at a cemetery near Bell's home during a secret night mission in July 2012. Bell was armed with a handgun at the time, but it's unclear if he used it.

They held target practice at a home-made firing range about the same time and recorded the shooting. In one session, they used beer cans as targets. When the juvenile mentioned the smell of beer, Bell said, "It may stink, but how you think the blood is going to smell?"

While training on another day, they heard an airplane overhead. Bell ordered them to take cover as if they were being watched by drones. He burned an American flag as part of that gathering.

On yet another day, Bell filmed himself referring to comments from bin Laden and talked of raising a jihadist flag over the White House and the prime minister's castle in Canada. He also recorded himself shooting at targets and exploding devices, including what he called a "frag grenade."

Bell and one of his accomplices headed to Yemen in September 2012 by first flying to Israel, where they were detained for an undisclosed reason and deported to Poland. They later traveled to Jordan to stay with the accomplice's relatives and continued planning to head for Yemen.

They were deported from Jordan in November 2012 for an undisclosed reason and Bell was questioned about his travels when he arrived in the United States. Bell told federal agents, "If you ask me if I was going for jihad in Yemen, I say yes." He also said he planned to fight with terrorists against anyone persecuting Muslims, Heavener said.

A federal grand jury indicted him Jacksonville eight months later.

Bell appeared in court Wednesday sporting an orange jail jumpsuit and a short haircut, in contrast to the long hair and scraggly beard he had when arrested last year. He made no statements during the hearing other than to acknowledge questions asked by U.S. Magistrate Jim Klindt.

Jim Schoettler: (904) 359-4385

Florida Man Pleads Guilty To Attempting To Join Al Qaeda Group

[Reuters](#), March 19, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Hatboro Man Arrested For Sending Ricin-laced Card

By Chris Palmer

[Philly](#), March 20, 2014

HATBORO A Hatboro man was arrested Wednesday night for allegedly sending a scratch-and-sniff birthday card laced with ricin to a man now dating his ex-girlfriend, authorities said.

Nicholas Todd Helman, 19, was charged with attempted murder and risking catastrophe after lab tests allegedly showed that the card he placed in the man's family mailbox March 6 was discovered this week to have contained traces of the toxic substance, Bucks County District Attorney David Heckler said.

The form of the substance was unclear. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says ricin can be distributed as a powder, mist, pellet, or dissolved in water.

Heckler stressed that the toxin was "very potent" and that Helman "hit the jackpot."

"He made ricin," Heckler said, "and if you lick that card, you're dead."

Helman had bragged of the toxic card to a coworker at Target in Warrington on March 6, according to a probable cause affidavit. The coworker then notified police, the affidavit says, and police called the man's home and spoke to his mother, asking whether she had retrieved the mail that day.

The mother, who, like her son, was not identified, told police that her daughter was outside retrieving the mail at that moment, according to the affidavit. Police advised them to return the mail to the mailbox, and authorities then came to the home to retrieve the card.

Initial tests did not indicate that the card contained ricin, according to Heckler.

When Helman was first questioned about the incident, on March 7, he told police that he had only coated the card with sodium hydroxide, the affidavit says, which he chose because it resembled the toxin anthrax.

Helman also admitted to sending threatening messages to the man via Facebook, according to the affidavit, and police seized from him what appeared to be sodium hydroxide and a notebook with a ricin recipe after questioning.

Helman was charged March 7 with terroristic threats and harassment.

In the meantime, Heckler said, authorities sent the card away for subsequent lab tests. The results, returned to the District Attorney's Office on Tuesday, confirmed that the card had traces of ricin, according to Heckler.

The dose on the card was not in a powder form that could spread, Heckler said, and there were no indications that anyone had been harmed by it.

But Heckler added, "If properly deployed, the stuff he put in that envelope would have killed a whole bunch of people."

The Warminster Police Department subsequently led numerous agencies in arresting Helman on Wednesday night at his Hatboro apartment, Heckler said. Other agencies included Hatboro police, SWAT and Hazmat teams, and the FBI.

Heckler said those teams were deployed in case Helman had more ricin, a poison that, according to the CDC, is found naturally in castor beans. It can be made by heating the waste material that results from processing the beans, the agency says, and ingestion can lead to death. There is no antidote, the CDC says.

Helman could not be reached for comment.

He was arraigned about 8 p.m. in front of Judge Charles W. Baum, according to Assistant District Attorney Antonetta Stancu, and was being held in Bucks County Prison without bail. cpalmer@phillynews.com 609-217-8305 @cs_palmer

Man Accused Of Sending Ricin-Laced Card To Romantic Rival

[WCAU-TV Philadelphia](#), March 20, 2014

After an hours-long standoff, 19-year-old Nicholas Helman was arrested at his Hatboro, PA home Wednesday. He's accused of sending ricin to his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend. NBC10's Nefertiti Jaquez has the latest on the investigation.

MontCo Teenager Arrested for...

Link to this video
<http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/video#!/news/local/MontCo-Teenager-Arrested-for-Allegedly-Mailing-Ricin/251131981>

Embed this video

Replay

A suburban Philadelphia man was arrested on Wednesday after he allegedly sent a birthday card laced with ricin to the boyfriend of his ex-girlfriend.

Nicholas Todd Helman, 19, was arrested on Wednesday at his home on Byberry Street in Hatboro. It was the second time he had been arrested this month in connection to the ricin-laced card, according to investigators.

Back on March 7, Helman allegedly told his co-worker at a Target store in Warrington that he had sent a scratch-

and-sniff birthday card laced with ricin to a man who was dating his ex-girlfriend.

Ricin is a poison found naturally in castor beans and can cause injury and even death if chewed, inhaled or swallowed. Helman allegedly told his co-worker that he rubbed ground castor beans onto the inside of the card before sending it to his intended victim's mailbox on Olive Street in Warminster.

Officials say Helman claimed the substance would kill anyone who came into contact with it within four days.

Helman's co-worker called police and Helman was taken into custody.

Helman allegedly told police he coated the card with sodium hydroxide in an attempt to scare his ex-girlfriend so that they could reconcile their relationship. Helman also allegedly sent threatening messages to his ex and her new boyfriend in November of last year, according to investigators.

Helman was charged with harassment and later released on bail.

Police say they warned the intended victim and his family not to open their mail. They then removed the envelope from the home.

Investigators later tested the substance on the card and determined that it was ricin.

A hazmat team, SWAT team, police officers and officials with the FBI returned to Helman's home on Wednesday. After a standoff that lasted several hours, Helman was led out of his apartment and to a police vehicle by officers clad in armor and hazmat gear.

He was arrested and charged with attempted murder.

Officials searched through Helman's home for any traces of the substance but determined that the scene was safe and clear.

A friend of Helman, who did not want to be identified, says he was shocked when he learned of the allegations against him.

"I really couldn't imagine him doing something like that," he said. "I've known him since Middle School. He was an odd kid. I would say he wasn't always the most social kid. He was very tech savy. He was probably the smartest kid I've ever known but he never really applied himself."

With his second arrest in one month, the friend says he hopes Helman can turn his life around.

"I know you can come out of this," he said. "I know you can."

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Ricin Letter Sent To Romantic Rival In Pennsylvania

By Denver Nicks

[TIME](#), March 20, 2014

Police arrested a man in Hatboro, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, for allegedly attempting to murder his ex-girlfriend's new beau with the toxic poison ricin.

Nicolas Todd Helman, 19, is alleged to have admitted to a coworker that he rubbed ricin—a highly toxic substance found naturally in castor beans—on a scratch-n-sniff birthday card in an effort to poison the new boyfriend. The coworker called police, who were able to warn the boyfriend not to open the mail before he came in contact with the ricin.

Helman reportedly wanted to rekindle the relationship and is alleged to have sent threatening messages to the ex and the new boyfriend last November, for which he was charged with harassment and released on bail. Authorities say the card tested positive for ricin and authorities, including hazmat, SWAT team, police and FBI officials descended on Helman's home Wednesday. He was arrested and charged with attempted murder.

Powder In Georgetown Room Tests Positive For Ricin; 'no Immediate Threat,' University Says

By Clarence Williams And Nick Anderson
[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

A white powder found Tuesday in a Georgetown University dorm room tested positive for ricin, but the university said Wednesday that there was no immediate threat to the community. Law enforcement officials said they believed there was no connection to terrorism.

In an e-mail to the campus community, school officials said Wednesday afternoon that a substance removed from a room in the McCarthy Hall dormitory tested positive for ricin. Ricin can cause respiratory distress, respiratory failure and multi-organ dysfunction, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Officials tested other areas of the room and the dorm, and the results came back negative, which means the ricin did not contaminate other areas.

"There is no immediate threat to members of the Georgetown community," the e-mail said.

School officials received no reports of anyone being exposed to the agent, authorities said. City health officials advised the school that symptoms of ricin exposure typically present themselves within 24 hours.

"This window has passed and there are no reports consistent with ricin exposure," the statement said.

FBI spokeswoman Jacqueline Maguire said no arrests had been made as of Wednesday, but officials continued to investigate. She declined to provide specifics about the substance or other details of the investigation.

Officials said they believe the substance was confined to one room. It was not clear how the ricin got to the room.

"In an abundance of caution, the university secured contractors who specialize in decontamination of biological threat agents to clean the room under investigation where the contained substance was recovered," the school's statement said.

Police had been called to McCarthy Hall, in the 3700 block of O Street NW, about 4:30 a.m. Tuesday morning, but no students were evacuated during the initial investigation.

Ricin is a poisonous protein powder made from castor beans, according to the CDC.

Non-threatening Ricin Found In Georgetown University Dorm Room

[WJLA-TV Washington](#), March 20, 2014

According to a letter from the school's chief of police, Jay Gruber, the ricin tested negative for any biological threat agents.

Police were called to McCarthy Hall early Tuesday for the possibility of ricin in a student's room.

"There is no immediate threat to members of the Georgetown community," Chief Gruber wrote. "The university consulted with the D.C. Department of Public Health, which informed us that anyone exposed to ricin would have presented with severe symptoms within 24 hours. The window has passed and there are no reports consistent with ricin exposure."

McCarthy Hall has since reopened.

The investigation is ongoing and has been handed over to the FBI.

Georgetown University Says Suspicious Substance Had Ricin

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) — Officials at Georgetown University say a substance in a dorm room has tested positive for ricin.

University Chief of Police Jay Gruber said in an email Wednesday that no one has reported any symptoms of ricin exposure since the possibility of ricin was reported Tuesday in McCarthy Hall.

Gruber said swabs were collected from the dorm room and analysis of those sample swabs did not show any biological threat agents.

The chief said the room was decontaminated and all areas of McCarthy Hall have reopened to students. He said there were no immediate threats to members of the Georgetown community.

FBI spokeswoman Jacqueline Maguire told The Washington Post that no arrests had been made, but an investigation continues.

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Statement from Georgetown University Chief of Police Jay Gruber:

Early Tuesday morning, the Georgetown University Police Department was made aware that a student reported having ricin in that student's room in McCarthy Hall. Local and federal authorities were notified and began investigations. The reported substance was recovered from the room and tested positive for ricin. Additionally, swabs were collected by DC Fire and EMS and the FBI in the student's room throughout the day on Tuesday, and all analysis of those sample swabs was negative for any biological threat agents. We are now able to reoccupy all areas of McCarthy Hall.

There is no immediate threat to members of the Georgetown community.

In an abundance of caution, the university secured contractors who specialize in decontamination of biological threat agents to clean the room under investigation where the contained substance was recovered.

In addition, the university consulted with the DC Department of Public Health, which informed us that anyone exposed to ricin would have presented with severe symptoms within 24 hours. This window has passed and there are no reports consistent with ricin exposure.

I would also like to thank all members of our community, especially the residents of McCarthy Hall, for their patience and cooperation.

OTHER CYBER NEWS

Expert: Cybersecurity Is 'Everyone's Responsibility'

By Oriana Pawlyk

[Military Times](#), March 19, 2014

At age 29, Peter Singer became the youngest person to be named a senior fellow in the 95-year history of the public policy think tank, Brookings Institution.

Now director of Brookings' Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, Singer's research has focused on changes in warfare — the emergence of private military companies such as Blackwater, the increase in child soldiers, and the growing role of robotics and drones. He's written books on each of those topics.

These days, he's the "go-to guy" for cyber expertise.

His latest book, "Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know," explains why cybersecurity isn't just an issue for leaders in the "big boy seats," but rather, for everyone using the Internet.

Q. How should military leaders see their role in cybersecurity?

A. This isn't just a Cyber Command issue or an IT department issue. It is everyone's responsibility to know, and everyone's responsibility to understand it. ... Because we're coming at it from one perspective,[where] we tend to focus too much on the software and the hardware and not the wetware, or the people side of it. So the technical community comes at it from a certain perspective but often fails to look at the issue beyond that technical perspective and also stovepipes it so we don't blend in lessons from areas and fields as well as lessons from history. ... I think what's played out in the [Edward] Snowden affair is a classic illustration of that.

Q. How would you describe the cyber mission?

A. You can't sum it up easily, but there are core themes: 1. People matter. That while it's portrayed as a technical issue, if you want to understand both the threats and the needed responses to them, it's always about the human side. 2. Incentives and organizations matter. If you want to understand why something is, or more importantly isn't, happening in cybersecurity, look to the organization people are in — the bureaucracy, the incentives, the trade off, the cost. ... 3. History matters. If you want to understand why you're in this certain situation in cyberspace, go back to the history of how you got there. [And] look to lessons beyond cyberspace.

Q. So how should non-cyber commanders integrate cyber concerns into their planning?

A. First is a mentality shift. If you are using the Internet, ... if you are using "cyberspace," and the odds [in the military] are you will be, considering that 98 percent of all U.S. military communications go over the civilian-owned and -operated Internet, you need to understand it and fold it into your expectations just like any other battlefield context. This is not something that you can hand off to someone else to understand for you.

Q. What obstacles do you see developing in cyber offense?

A. I would describe it more as speed bumps. ... It's issues like budget: We're in a flat budget environment, but simultaneously, this is a "sexy area." And so now, everyone's trying to get into [cyber] or at least act like they're in it. For example, a couple years ago, the Pentagon budget had four mentions of the word cyber. This year, it had 147 mentions. ... This year's [Quadrennial Defense Review] used the word cyber on average one time every other page. In 2006, the QDR had the word cyber one time every 10 pages. ... We can see there's a lot of energy focused on it; on the other hand, it can [get watered] down because everything and anything is in it.

Q. Other speed bumps?

A. Another issue is the personnel question: How to do attract top talent into it? Particularly when the long-term career trajectory is still not clear. When on one hand folks in this community are highly sought after, on the other, they're paralleled with the remotely piloted systems community — "You're the most active, you're the fastest growing, but gosh you make the rest of the service really uncomfortable." And anytime we set up things to draw you in or reward you, or recognize you, there's lashback. So you have that personnel problem on the front end, and [it also affects] the retention side. ... So you have a human talent question of, "How do I promote people?"

NATIONAL SECURITY NEWS

Paul To Rebuke Obama On Spying, Citing '60s Abuses

By Jeremy W. Peters

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

BERKELEY, Calif. — Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, says President Obama should be particularly wary of domestic spying, given the government's history of eavesdropping on civil rights leaders such as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The first African-American president ought to be a little more conscious of the fact of what has happened with the abuses of domestic spying," Mr. Paul said, previewing remarks he planned to deliver to a group of students and faculty members Wednesday afternoon at the University of California, Berkeley.

"Martin Luther King was spied upon, civil rights leaders were spied upon, Muhammad Ali was spied upon, antiwar protesters were spied upon," he said. "The possibility for abuse in this is incredible. So I don't care if there's never been any evidence of abuse with the N.S.A., they should not be collecting the data."

Mr. Paul has not been shy about making provocative statements, especially when it comes to the issues that animate him. He held a 13-hour filibuster on drones last year and more recently called former President Bill Clinton a "sexual predator."

In his talk on a campus synonymous with liberal American thought, Mr. Paul — who is among his party's top tier of possible 2016 presidential candidates — seemed likely to touch off another heated debate by invoking the delicate issue of race and the government's history of using surveillance to track civil rights leaders as part of his attack on the Obama administration's domestic spying programs.

Though many Republicans and Democrats have been unwilling to call for an end to the National Security Agency's data sweeps that collect communications records of virtually all Americans, Mr. Paul has been one of the loudest voices

calling for wholesale change. He has filed a class-action lawsuit against Mr. Obama and the leaders of several intelligence agencies, accusing them of violating the Fourth Amendment.

His trip to the university here is the latest piece of a carefully constructed plan by Mr. Paul and his political operation to try to broaden his appeal beyond the Republican Party. Mr. Paul has had tough words for his party and its leaders lately, saying they risk shutting themselves out of power for years to come if they do not start convincing young people, blacks, Hispanics and others who have abandoned Republicans that the party can and will change.

He picked Berkeley as an ideal place to test out his message on a group of new potential supporters, he said, because the issue of domestic spying has deeply upset many liberals and turned many of the president's loyal constituents on the left against him.

The president's position on the legality of the surveillance programs, he said in the interview, is a "fundamental, absolutely fundamental misunderstanding of due process."

This is not the first time Mr. Paul has set foot inside potentially hostile territory. Last year he visited Howard University, the historically black institution in Washington, in an attempt to try to show that the Republican Party is not as out of sync with young African-Americans as many of them might think.

As for how he expects to be received in Berkeley, he tried to be modest. The point of his visit, he said is "hopefully showing that the message of a Republican with a libertarian twist may well be acceptable to people, even in Berkeley. And we'll see."

Official: Court's Sign-off For Queries On Americans' Data Would Be Impractical

By Ellen Nakashima

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

A senior government lawyer said Wednesday that the high volume of searches that the National Security Agency makes of a database that holds Americans' and foreigners' communications would make court approval for queries involving Americans impractical.

Appearing before the government's civil liberties watchdog panel, Robert S. Litt, general counsel for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said "the number of times we query" the database for information "is considerably larger" than 288. That's the number of queries made for a different type of data in a separate NSA program that Litt used as a comparison.

Requiring court sign-off for queries of Americans' e-mails and phone calls had been the suggestion of a White House review panel on government surveillance activities as

well as a number of lawmakers who are seeking changes to intelligence programs.

But Litt told the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, an independent watchdog agency, that “the operational burden” would be so great that he suspects the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which oversees the program, “would be extremely unhappy if they were required to approve every such query.”

Replied board member and former federal judge Patricia Wald: “I suppose the ultimate question for us is whether or not the inconvenience to the agencies or even the unhappiness of the [surveillance] court would be the ultimate criteria.”

At issue is a 2008 law known as Section 702 of the FISA Amendments Act, which authorized the government to target foreigners reasonably believed to be located overseas. But officials say there are “minimization” rules to protect the privacy of Americans and there are reviews done to ensure that the agency is targeting foreigners.

NSA General Counsel Rajesh De said, for instance, that determining who is a foreigner is based on the “totality” of the circumstances and not on a percentage, as has been reported. “There is no 51 percent rule,” he said.

He also said that the communications that are collected “upstream” at the switches of telecommunications providers are held for only two years, in contrast to the five-year retention period for e-mails gathered from companies such as Google and Yahoo.

One reason for that shorter retention period, he said, is that the government makes a controversial type of query on the upstream communications in which they attempt to pluck out a foreign target’s e-mail address or phone number from the body of the communication, and not the “to” or “from” line.

The nature of the “about” queries — or queries about a target — means that “there is a greater likelihood of [picking up Americans’] communications or wholly domestic communications,” De said.

Those queries do not include general search terms, or even the person’s name, De said. They are made on the e-mail address or phone number, he said. Such queries are conducted only upstream and not at the e-mail companies, he said.

But experts who testified in a second panel said they did not believe that Congress intended to allow the government to make such queries. “To the contrary, when legislators discussed surveillance, they discussed surveillance of the target,” not “about” the target, said Jameel Jaffer, ACLU deputy legal director. “So I think this is an entirely foreign concept.”

In general, Jaffer argued, the agency’s “about” queries and the privacy and targeting procedures approved by the court exceed the law’s bounds.

CIA-Senate Spat Complicates Spying Oversight

By Eileen Sullivan

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) – The government’s top intelligence lawyers on Wednesday renewed assurances that Congress is adequately monitoring U.S. surveillance programs. But it’s suddenly an awkward argument for the Obama administration, since the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee publicly accused the CIA of illegally monitoring its investigators as they carried out their oversight duties.

Since disclosures about the National Security Agency’s surveillance programs, including the collection of phone records and emails of millions of U.S. citizens, the administration has said they were approved and overseen by all three branches of the U.S. government.

The congressional intelligence committees are intended to keep the government’s secret activities in check. Those lawmakers are privy to classified details, and Americans rely on them to ensure that the intelligence community follows the law, that the intelligence collection doesn’t eviscerate civil liberties, and that the programs are effective in preventing threats to the U.S.

“We’ve set the balance between public disclosure and the need for secrecy by empowering the congressional intelligence committees,” Robert Litt, general counsel of the office of the director of national intelligence, said Wednesday. Litt was speaking to a privacy oversight panel that has been reviewing some of the more controversial spy programs revealed last year.

But that balance is suspect amid complaints that the executive branch interferes with Congress. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., the chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a longtime supporter of the NSA surveillance programs, has accused the government of this type of interference.

Feinstein said the CIA interfered with and then tried to intimidate a congressional investigation into the agency’s possible use of torture as it probed suspected terrorists after the Sept. 11 attacks.

“This is kind of a raw example of how things can go wrong in congressional oversight,” said David M. Barrett, a Villanova University professor who has studied the history of Congress and the intelligence community. “Congressional oversight of intelligence is going to be imperfect. It always is.”

Some lawmakers have said the allegations, if true, have constitutional implications by preventing Congress from carrying out its oversight duties – the same duties the Obama administration points to when it justifies the legality of its intelligence programs.

When details of the NSA programs were disclosed last year by former NSA systems analyst Edward Snowden, the Obama administration and other supporters said the programs were key to preventing terrorism. But justifying the effectiveness of a secret program proved difficult, because details are classified.

"How can anybody except you people do that?" a member of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, Patricia Wald, asked the government.

The Obama administration's answer: Congress.

"I think the public record now indicates there is a fairly robust exchange between the executive branch and the legislative branch on a variety of programs. And so I think that's where traditionally the evaluation has occurred," NSA general counsel Rajesh De said.

Privacy advocates have been critical of the congressional oversight of the NSA programs, raising concerns that lawmakers are too close to the administration, hindering objective and effective oversight of the secret programs.

"Even when Congress tries to do some oversight, they're thwarted by the administration," said Michelle Richardson of the American Civil Liberties Union. "I don't think the public has faith in congressional oversight anymore."

The former chief counsel for the Church Committee, the special Senate panel created in 1975 that preceded today's Senate and House intelligence oversight committees, urged Congress this week to appoint a special panel to review the intelligence activities of the CIA and NSA.

"There is a crisis of public confidence," F.A.O. Schwarz Jr. and more than a dozen former congressional aides wrote in a letter. "Misleading statements by agency officials to Congress, the courts and the public have undermined public trust in the intelligence community and in the capacity for the branches of government to provide meaningful oversight."

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DOJ Reviewing Dianne Feinstein's CIA Spying Allegations

By Niels Lesniewski

[Roll Call](#), March 20, 2014

The Justice Department is reviewing allegations made by the CIA and the Senate Intelligence Committee accusing each other of improper activity.

Asked about the matter on Wednesday, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr., stopped short of calling the Justice Department's involvement an investigation.

"We get referrals all the time. The fact that we get a referral does not necessarily mean we make a decision that we're going to investigate on the basis of that referral," Holder

said at a news conference. "And so, we are looking at the matters that have been referred to us before we make any determinations about what action, if any, the Justice Department will take."

Holder was asked whether it was a matter best worked out between the parties involved. Senate Intelligence Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein alleged in a bombshell floor speech on March 11 that the CIA had improperly accessed computer files being used by the California Democrat's committee staff. In a related matter, the CIA has asked the Justice Department to review potential illegal acts by committee staffers in removing documents from the secure facility.

Media outlets including Reuters reported on Tuesday that the FBI was looking into the competing complaints.

This is all related to the committee's production of a 6,300 page report on torture techniques and detainee policies used in interrogations during the George W. Bush administration. In her floor speech, Feinstein signaled an intent to move ahead with a vote on declassification as early as this month.

Majority Whip Richard J. Durbin, D-Ill., the chairman of the Appropriations subpanel that provides funding for the intelligence services, wouldn't rule out using the power of the purse to help make sure release of the report moves forward. Durbin fired off a detailed missive to CIA Director John O. Brennan outlining his concerns and backing Feinstein.

Google CEO Calls NSA Spying 'Disappointing'

By Olga Kharif And Brian Womack

[Bloomberg News](#), March 19, 2014

Google Inc. (GOOG) Chief Executive Officer Larry Page criticized the National Security Agency's surveillance activities, calling for limits on what the U.S. government can do.

"It's tremendously disappointing that our government did this and didn't tell us," Page said during a presentation at a TED technology and design conference in Vancouver. "We need to know what the parameters of this are."

Page has said little publicly about the NSA's data collection since co-authoring a blog post in June following last year's release of documents by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden that disclosed how global spy agencies gather vast amounts of data about phone calls and online activities. The revelations, which showed that authorities had been gathering data from companies such as Google, Facebook Inc. and Apple Inc., frayed U.S. relationships with countries such as Brazil and Germany and set off a global debate about the violation of privacy to bolster security.

The proliferation of digital and wireless devices has boosted the amount of information that can be gathered on individuals, Page said.

"We need to have a debate about that, or we can't have a democracy," Page said. "The world is changing, you carry a phone, it knows where you are. There's so much more information about you. The main thing we need to do is provide people choice – show them what kind of information is getting collected."

The comment comes less than a week after Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said he called U.S. President Barack Obama to express his frustration over the government's spying.

"The U.S. government should be the champion for the Internet, not a threat," Zuckerberg wrote in a post on his Facebook page.

Judge Extends Order Blocking Data Destruction

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

SAN FRANCISCO — A federal judge in San Francisco has extended his nationwide order blocking the National Security Agency from destroying telephone surveillance records.

U.S. District Judge Jeffrey White issued a restraining order on March 10 to prevent the National Security Agency from destroying phone records that it had collected more than five years ago.

On Wednesday, White, who is overseeing an invasion-of-privacy lawsuit against the agency, prolonged that order, ruling the records were needed to decide the case.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports (<http://bit.ly/1j9mp67>) that the 23 organizations who are plaintiffs in the suit include churches, marijuana advocates and gun owners.

Cindy Cohn of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the plaintiffs' lawyer, said the records could be destroyed if the government would confirm that the plaintiffs' phone data was collected, but the Justice Department's lawyer, James Gilligan, said that information should remain secret.

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Israeli Warplanes Strike Syrian Military Positions In Golan Heights

By Ruth Eglash And Liz Sly

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

JERUSALEM — Israeli warplanes attacked Syrian military positions on Wednesday in retaliation for a bombing the previous day, in the most serious confrontation between the two foes since the Syrian conflict erupted three years ago.

Syria said one of its soldiers was killed and seven were injured when three army positions near the town of Quneitra

were struck on the Syrian side of the ceasefire line between the two countries in the Golan Heights.

Israel said the targets were an army training facility, a military headquarters and an artillery battery, and that the raids came in response to a bombing along the line on Tuesday that injured four Israeli soldiers.

The attacks sent tensions soaring in the already strained area, where Syrian troops aided by irregular militias are battling rebels from a variety of allegiances intent on unseating Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Stray shells have struck Israel on a number of occasions and Israel has retaliated with artillery strikes to deter the fire, but this is the first direct confrontation between the two militaries across the line.

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Peter Lerner said Israel did not know whether the Syrian army, its ally Hezbollah or the rebels they are fighting may have been responsible for planting the bomb. But Israel holds the Syrian army responsible, he said.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon went further, accusing Syria's government of collaborating with "terrorists" to plant the bomb and warning that the situation could escalate if there are further attacks.

"We hold the Assad regime responsible for what happens in its territory and if it continues to collaborate with terrorists striving to hurt Israel, then we will keep on exacting a heavy price from it and make it regret its actions," Yaalon said.

"Our policy is clear. We hurt those who hurt us," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, addressing the Israeli cabinet.

Syria's military command issued a counterwarning, accusing Israel of seeking to escalate tensions in order to take attention from the Syrian government's recent advances against rebel fighters. The strikes offered "a dose of moral support to the terrorist gangs tumbling under the Syrian Arab Army's strikes," the Syrian military command said in a statement carried by the official news agency SANA.

"Repeating these aggressive acts would jeopardize the region's security and stability and make it vulnerable to all options," the statement said.

Though Israel has carried out numerous airstrikes against Syria over the past year, it is unusual for either party to acknowledge them, and the public statements seemed to underscore the seriousness of this latest confrontation. The previous Israeli strikes were aimed at preventing deliveries of sophisticated weapons from Syria to the Shiite Lebanese Hezbollah movement, which Israel fought in a 2006 war, but Wednesday's airstrikes raised tensions directly between Tel Aviv and Damascus.

Speaking at a meeting of his Likud party's faction in the Israeli parliament Tuesday night, Netanyahu said that the

situation on the Golan Heights was becoming a serious threat to Israel.

"The area is filling up with jihadist and Hezbollah militants, posing a new challenge for Israel," he said. "In recent years, we were able to maintain quiet despite the civil war in Syria. Now we have to act firmly to maintain the security of Israel."

Speaking on the condition of anonymity for security reasons, a senior Israeli military official stationed in Israel's northern border region said Israel is becoming increasingly concerned about events taking place in Syria. He said incidents involving roadside bombs and stray rockets fired into Israeli territory have been growing in frequency in recent months. Last Friday, a similar explosive device was detonated but with no injuries.

"Israel does not really care who did this, but it will not allow people to shoot at us or blow up side charges," said Mordechai Kedar of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University.

He said an escalation was possible because the situation in Syria is deteriorating and "there are those who would like to drag Israel into the war."

"The question is what is the price? If they know that the price they have to pay might be high, then maybe they will leave Israel alone," Kedar said.

Since the start of the uprising in Syria three years ago, Israel has invested more than \$57.3 million in a state-of-the-art border fence in the Israeli-occupied section of the Golan Heights. Still, there are points that need enforcing. Israel announced Wednesday it would reinforce its outposts on the Golan Heights in order to prevent future attacks.

Israel Attacks Syrian Positions In Golan Heights

By Isabel Kershner

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

JERUSALEM — Israeli airstrikes against several Syrian Army positions across the decades-old cease-fire line in the Golan Heights on Wednesday came as a specific response to a bomb attack against Israeli forces along the frontier a day earlier, according to Israeli officials. But for many here, the unusually sharp exchange signaled the possibility of a broader Israeli slide into the regional turmoil.

The airstrikes, against a Syrian Army training facility, a military headquarters and artillery batteries, were the first in Syrian territory that Israel has openly acknowledged since the Syrian civil war began three years ago. The bomb attack on Tuesday that prompted the strikes was the first to cause Israeli casualties, wounding four soldiers, one severely. Both events raised the stakes along a frontier that has been mostly quiet for 40 years.

The Syrian armed forces said in a statement quoted by the official Syrian news agency, SANA, that the airstrikes killed one person and wounded seven. The statement described the Israeli attacks as a breach of the separation-of-forces agreement that has been in place since the cease-fire that was reached after the 1973 war, which left a portion of the strategic Syrian plateau under Israeli control.

The statement added that the Syrian leadership viewed Israel's "new aggression" as an attempt to divert attention from the recent victories of the Syrian Army, particularly in retaking the town of Yabrud. It warned that Israel's actions endangered stability in the border area and could open up "all possibilities."

The Israeli military said the Syrian positions it struck had "aided and abetted" the bomb attack on Tuesday. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel told his cabinet on Wednesday, "Our policy is very clear: We attack those who attack us."

Moshe Yaalon, the defense minister, warned in a statement that Israel viewed the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad as "responsible for whatever happens in his territory, and if he continues to cooperate with terrorist elements who are striving to harm Israel, we will continue to exact a heavy price in a manner that will bring him to regret his actions."

Israel has declared a policy of neutrality regarding Mr. Assad's struggle against rebel forces, but at the same time, it has been carrying out a covert campaign to prevent the transfer of sophisticated weapons from Syria to Hezbollah, the militant Lebanese Shiite organization. Israel and Hezbollah engaged in a monthlong war in 2006 and Hezbollah is currently fighting in Syria on the side of the Assad government.

At least half a dozen airstrikes against weapons convoys and warehouses, mostly in Syrian territory, have been attributed to Israel over the past year. Israel has refused to confirm or deny involvement, largely to stave off retaliation. But in his remarks on Wednesday, Mr. Netanyahu said that Israel was, to the best of its ability, "interdicting the transfer of weapons by sea, air and land, and this activity will continue."

Further complicating the situation, a senior Israeli military officer told reporters recently that only a third of the Israeli-Syrian frontier in the Golan Heights was under the control of Syrian government forces, and the rest was controlled by up to 20 different rebel groups, including radical jihadi forces. Mr. Netanyahu said on Tuesday that the frontier "has been filling up recently with jihadi elements and Hezbollah," presenting a new challenge to Israel.

But Wednesday's airstrikes came in a different context from the covert campaign against the weapons transfers, as did Israel's pointed confirmation of the action. "It was a retaliatory attack and it was meant to deter," said Ron Ben-Yishai, the military affairs analyst for Ynet, an Israeli news

site. He described the strikes as “a moderate and very calculated escalation.”

Many Israelis are concerned that Israel — by its own actions or those of others — is being inexorably pulled toward a more serious confrontation with Hezbollah or Syrian forces.

After Hezbollah accused Israel of striking one of its positions near Lebanon’s border with Syria in late February and threatened to retaliate, Israeli forces identified two men it described as “Hezbollah-affiliated terrorists” trying to plant a bomb on the Syrian side of the border fence in the Golan Heights and fired at them. Last Friday, a large explosive device was detonated against an Israeli Army vehicle patrolling adjacent to the Israeli-Lebanese border and Israeli military officials said they suspected that Hezbollah was behind the attack. Then, Israel responded with tank and artillery fire against Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon.

Shlomo Brom, a retired general at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, said in a recent interview that Israel was allowing itself to do more to stop advanced weapons from reaching Hezbollah because Hezbollah and Syria were weakened by their embroilment in the Syrian civil war. But he said Israeli actions “could bring us to a point where we cross the line,” compelling Hezbollah to retaliate and risking further Israeli entanglement.

Alex Fishman, the military affairs analyst for the popular newspaper Yediot Aharonot, wrote in an article published on Wednesday, “The Syrians and Hezbollah have been dragging Israel into a war of attrition on the northern border at a timing and pace that they have dictated,” adding, “The Israeli security establishment has been dragged into this brawl with its eyes wide open.”

U.N. Stymied In Efforts To Take Aid To Syrians

By Somini Sengupta

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

UNITED NATIONS — In the three weeks since the United Nations Security Council ordered Syria’s warring parties to let aid workers deliver food and medicine, the world body’s relief agencies have suspended their efforts to cross one land border, are waiting to cross another and are facing severe difficulties getting food into a Damascus neighborhood where children are starving.

What happens in the next few days will be closely watched by the world powers that support either the Syrian government or the armed opposition. The Security Council on Monday is expecting its first report from the secretary general on whether the Syrian government and the rebels have complied with the Feb 22 resolution. And when the Council meets next Friday, Russia and the United States are likely to spar over which side in the conflict is to blame for holding up desperately needed assistance.

For the United Nations, getting aid into Syria from across its land borders has been among its most urgent,

toughest challenges. Days after the Security Council resolution, the Syrian government agreed to let the United Nations and its partners enter from Turkey. But for two weeks, 80 trucks have been waiting on the Turkish side of the border, packed with clothing, food, and other aid bound for people living in the vast Hasakah Province, where no aid has arrived for a year.

“The Security Council resolution gave us a new opening, a new opportunity to engage” said Yacoub El Hillo, the United Nations humanitarian coordinator for Syria, who negotiated the deal with Syrian and Turkish government officials.

The United Nations had not suggested this border crossing until recently, largely because of tense relations between President Bashar al-Assad and the government of Turkey, which hosts several of his opponents. The resolution was worded in such a way that United Nations agencies are required to obtain Syrian government permission before they can cross one of its national borders.

The proposed route is further complicated because, as another United Nations official pointed out, it would bring aid through areas largely controlled by militants affiliated with a Kurdish separatist group that the Turkish government considers a terrorist organization. The agreement could therefore allow the Syrian government to appear reasonable in letting in aid, while pointing a finger at its rival Turkey for balking, the official said.

“My perception is that this was a clever move by the Syrian government to make a proposal that will be difficult for the Turks,” the official said.

Recriminations aside, the Council is unlikely to take immediate action against those who defy its legally binding resolution. Russia is certain to veto any further measures that would penalize the Syrian government.

The United Nations says that more than 250,000 people are trapped in besieged areas. Unicef estimates that half of them are children.

The scale of the challenge is so vast, according to Anthony Lake, the executive director of Unicef, that even modest improvements would be too little, too late. “I’m quite sure there will be some progress,” he said. “We will need a lot more.”

One of the worst hit areas is the Damascus neighborhood Yarmouk, where more than a dozen rebel groups have been battling for control. Aid trickled in last month and then stopped on Feb. 28, after fighting intensified.

On Tuesday, the United Nations was able to bring in some food. On Wednesday it tried again, but desperate throngs of people made it impossible to distribute anything, said Chris Gunness, a United Nations spokesman. The United Nations has found widespread malnutrition in Yarmouk, which it says has caused a rising number of deaths.

The United Nations had been negotiating to send aid convoys into northern Syria from Iraq, but suspended those efforts recently because of the fighting. Likewise, aid agencies have been unable to gain access to civilians near Aleppo, where the rebels have blocked access, as well as the town of Mouadamiya, which has been besieged by government forces, officials said.

Mr. El Hillo led negotiations in late February to bring food and medicine into the Old City of Homs, which is controlled by rebel groups, including those affiliated with Al Qaeda. Aid workers have not been able to return to the Old City since then.

"If we were expecting the resolution to make it possible for the U.N. and our partners to reach besieged communities in every part of country today, without delay and without waiting, we haven't done that yet," he said.

Nearly Half Of Syria's Chemical Arms Supply Removed

By Rick Gladstone

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

Nearly half of Syria's chemical stockpile for weapons use has now been removed from the war-ravaged country, the organization helping to oversee the elimination of the deadly arsenal reported on Wednesday.

The organization said in a statement that two shipments, including some of the most lethal chemicals from the stockpile, were delivered on March 14 and 17 to the Syrian port of Latakia, where they were transferred to cargo ships, making a total of 10 exported shipments so far.

"The latest movements increased the portion of chemicals that have now been removed from Syria for destruction outside the country to more than 45 percent," said the statement, issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Hague-based group that is collaborating with the United Nations to ensure the arsenal's destruction.

The statement was the first progress report on the Syrian government's commitment to getting rid of the chemicals since the Syrians proposed a revised timetable for exporting them early this month. The timetable's revision, which calls for the job to be finished by the end of April instead of Feb. 6 as originally planned, came after Syria missed deadlines in the destruction effort and was widely criticized internationally.

The statement also appeared to suggest that Russia and the United States were continuing to cooperate in pressuring Syria to comply with its pledges on chemical weapons, despite the crisis in Ukraine, which has deeply chilled relations between Moscow and Washington.

Under a United Nations Security Council resolution that was supported by both Russia and the United States, the entire Syrian chemical arsenal must be destroyed by June 30.

The Syrian government has argued that it could not expedite the export of the chemicals, a total of 1,200 tons, because of its three-year-old civil war, which has made overland transport difficult and dangerous. The United States and other Western countries accused the Syrians of procrastinating, and top officials at both the United Nations and the chemical-weapons organization urged them to accelerate their efforts.

Left unclear in the statement released Wednesday was whether a separate dispute regarding Syria's 12 chemical production facilities — seven aircraft hangars and five tunnels — had been resolved. Syria has proposed sealing the facilities, but leaving them intact. The United States has demanded that Syria destroy them, arguing that they could be reactivated otherwise.

With the latest shipments, the statement said, about 29.5 percent of the so-called Priority 1 chemicals, classified as the most dangerous, have been removed from Syria, including all of its sulfur mustard. The statement said that 82.6 percent of Syria's Priority 2 chemicals, which are not necessarily toxic but are ingredients for lethal gases and nerve agents, had been removed as well.

The Syrian government agreed to renounce its chemical weapons program following worldwide outrage over an Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack in a Damascus suburb, in which each side in the civil war blamed the other. The United States threatened to hit Syrian military installations with missile strikes in response, but dropped the threat when Russia brokered a diplomatic agreement to eliminate the weapons, which led to the Security Council resolution on Sept. 27.

U.S. May Have Paid Afghan Police Force For 'ghost Workers'

By Douglas Ernst

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

The fraud, waste and abuse stories from Afghanistan have entered new territory — "ghost workers."

John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, initiated an audit to determine whether U.S. funds were distributed to fictitious members of the Afghan police force. To do so he will have to examine the "Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan" (LOFTA), which helps to pay the salaries of more than 140,000 Afghan police officers, Reuters reported.

Mr. Sopko wrote two U.S. generals and one Canadian general in the NATO mission about his concern that "the U.S. may be unwittingly helping to pay the salaries of non-existent members of the Afghan National Police."

Reuters reported that 38 percent of the \$3.17 billion trust fund is paid by the U.S., with the rest being picked up by the international community since 2002.

Col. Jane Crichton, a spokeswoman for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, told the news agency that 99 percent of the 54,000 ID card numbers identified during an investigation have been reconciled, with no proof of non-existent employees to date.

The Defense Department's Inspector General is expected to release a final report on the matter in July, Reuters reported.

Taliban Bastion Awaits Afghan Vote

In Kandahar, Hope for Better Governance Mixes With Fears of Fraud in April's Presidential Election

By Yaroslav Trofimov

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

What Pakistan Knew About Bin Laden

By Carlotta Gall

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

Shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks, I went to live and report for The New York Times in Afghanistan. I would spend most of the next 12 years there, following the overthrow of the Taliban, feeling the excitement of the freedom and prosperity that was promised in its wake and then watching the gradual dissolution of that hope. A new Constitution and two rounds of elections did not improve the lives of ordinary Afghans; the Taliban regrouped and found increasing numbers of supporters for their guerrilla actions; by 2006, as they mounted an ambitious offensive to retake southern Afghanistan and unleashed more than a hundred suicide bombers, it was clear that a deadly and determined opponent was growing in strength, not losing it. As I toured the bomb sites and battlegrounds of the Taliban resurgence, Afghans kept telling me the same thing: The organizers of the insurgency were in Pakistan, specifically in the western district of Quetta. Police investigators were finding that many of the bombers, too, were coming from Pakistan.

In December 2006, I flew to Quetta, where I met with several Pakistani reporters and a photographer. Together we found families who were grappling with the realization that their sons had blown themselves up in Afghanistan. Some were not even sure whether to believe the news, relayed in anonymous phone calls or secondhand through someone in the community. All of them were scared to say how their sons died and who recruited them, fearing trouble from members of the ISI, Pakistan's main intelligence service.

After our first day of reporting in Quetta, we noticed that an intelligence agent on a motorbike was following us, and everyone we interviewed was visited afterward by ISI agents.

We visited a neighborhood called Pashtunabad, "town of the Pashtuns," a close-knit community of narrow alleys inhabited largely by Afghan refugees who over the years spread up the hillside, building one-story houses from mud and straw. The people are working class: laborers, bus drivers and shopkeepers. The neighborhood is also home to several members of the Taliban, who live in larger houses behind high walls, often next to the mosques and madrasas they run.

The small, untidy entrance on the street to one of those madrasas, the Jamiya Islamiya, conceals the size of the establishment. Inside, a brick-and-concrete building three stories high surrounds a courtyard, and classrooms can accommodate 280 students. At least three of the suicide bombers we were tracing had been students here, and there were reports of more. Senior figures from Pakistani religious parties and provincial-government officials were frequent visitors, and Taliban members would often visit under the cover of darkness in fleets of S.U.V.s.

We requested an interview and were told that a female journalist would not be permitted inside, so I passed some questions to the Pakistani reporter with me, and he and the photographer went in. The deputy head of the madrasa denied that there was any militant training there or any forced recruitment for jihad. "We are educating the students in the Quran, and in the Quran it is written that it is every Muslim's obligation to wage jihad," he said. "All we are telling them is what is in the Quran. Then it is up to them to go to jihad." He ended the conversation. Classes were breaking up, and I could hear a clamor rising as students burst out of their classrooms. Boys poured out of the gates onto the street. They looked spindly, in flapping clothes and prayer caps, as they darted off on their bikes and on foot, chasing one another down the street.

The reporter and the photographer joined me outside. They told me that words of praise were painted across the wall of the inner courtyard for the madrasa's political patron, a Pakistani religious-party leader, and the Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar. This madrasa, like so many in Pakistan, was a source of the Taliban resurgence that President Hamid Karzai and other Afghan leaders had long been warning about. In this nondescript madrasa in a poor neighborhood of Quetta, one of hundreds throughout the border region, the Taliban and Pakistan's religious parties were working together to raise an army of militants.

"The madrasas are a cover, a camouflage," a Pashtun legislator from the area told me. Behind the curtain, hidden in the shadows, lurked the ISI.

The Pakistani government, under President Pervez Musharraf and his intelligence chief, Lt. Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, was maintaining and protecting the Taliban, both to control the many groups of militants now lodged in the country and to use them as a proxy force to gain leverage over and eventually dominate Afghanistan. The dynamic has

played out in ways that can be hard to grasp from the outside, but the strategy that has evolved in Pakistan has been to make a show of cooperation with the American fight against terrorism while covertly abetting and even coordinating Taliban, Kashmiri and foreign Qaeda-linked militants. The linchpin in this two-pronged and at times apparently oppositional strategy is the ISI. It's through that agency that Pakistan's true relationship to militant extremism can be discerned — a fact that the United States was slow to appreciate, and later refused to face directly, for fear of setting off a greater confrontation with a powerful Muslim nation.

On our fifth and last day in Quetta, four plainclothes agents detained my photographer colleague at his hotel. They seized his computer and photo equipment and brought him to the parking lot of the hotel where I was staying. There they made him call and ask me to come down to talk to them. "I'm in trouble here," he told me. It was after dark. I did not want to go down to the parking lot, but I told my colleague I would get help. I alerted my editor in New York and then tried to call Pakistani officials.

Before I could reach them, the agents broke through the door of my hotel room. The lintel splintered, and they burst in in a rush, snatching my laptop from my hands. There was an English-speaking officer wearing a smart new khaki-colored fleece. The other three, one of whom had the photographer in tow, were the muscle.

They went through my clothes and seized my notebooks and a cellphone. When one of the men grabbed my handbag, I protested. He punched me twice, hard, in the face and temple, and I fell back onto the coffee table, grabbing at the officer's fleece to break my fall and smashing some cups when I landed. For a moment it was funny. I remember thinking it was just like a hotel-room bust-up in the movies.

Then I flew into a rage, berating them for barging into a woman's bedroom and using physical violence. The officer told me that I was not permitted to visit the neighborhood of Pashtunabad and that it was forbidden to interview members of the Taliban. As they were leaving, I said the photographer had to stay with me. "He is Pakistani," the officer said. "We can do with him whatever we want." I knew they were capable of torture and murder, especially in Quetta, where the security services were a law unto themselves. The story they didn't want out in the open was the government's covert support for the militant groups that were propagating terrorism in Afghanistan and beyond.

Six months later, Pakistan blew up. In the spring of 2007 in Islamabad, female students from a madrasa attached to the Red Mosque were staging a sit-in to protest the demolition of several illegal mosques in the city. The Red Mosque stood at the center of Pakistan's support for jihad in Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim world. It was founded

by a famed jihadi preacher, Maulana Muhammad Abdullah, who was assassinated in 1998, not long after he visited Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda blamed the killing on the Pakistani government at the time.

Abdullah's sons inherited the mosque and continued its extremist teachings. The eldest, Maulana Abdul Aziz, delivered fiery Friday sermons excoriating Musharraf for his public stance on the fight against terrorism and his dealings with the American government. Despite an earlier reputation as a nonreligious bureaucrat, the younger brother, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, spoke of undergoing a conversion after his father's death and a meeting with Bin Laden, and by 2007 he would not leave the Red Mosque compound for fear of arrest. He warned that ranks of suicide bombers would retaliate if the government moved against the student protesters.

With such leaders behind them, the students began staging vigilante actions in the streets. They were radical and obsessive, vowing to die rather than give up their protest. The government's inaction only encouraged them. Several months after the protest began, a group of students made a midnight raid on a massage parlor and abducted several Chinese women.

Remonstrations from China, Pakistan's most important regional ally, pushed Musharraf to take action. Pakistani Army rangers occupied a school across the street, and police officers and soldiers moved in to surround the mosque on July 3. Armed fighters appeared from the mosque, carrying rockets and assault rifles and taking up sandbagged positions on the mosque walls. Loudspeakers told the students that this was the time for bravery. A female student took over the microphone. "Allah, where is your help?" she asked in a quavering voice. "Destroy the enemies. Tear their hearts apart. Throw fireballs on them."

Islamabad is a green, tranquil home for civil servants and diplomats, but for several days it resounded with gunfire and explosions. Crowds of worried parents arrived from all over the country to try to retrieve their children. The Red Mosque leaders tried to make the students stay. "They said if the women and others die, the people will take their side," one father told me, and I realized then how premeditated this all was, how the girls were pawns in their plan to spark a revolution.

A week after the siege began, there was a ferocious battle. Elite Pakistani commandos rappelled from helicopters into the mosque and were raked with machine-gun fire. Perched in the mosque's minarets and throughout its 75 rooms, the militants fought for 10 hours. They hurled grenades from bunkers and basements, and suicide bombers threw themselves at their attackers. The commandos found female students hiding in a bricked-up space beneath the stairs and led 50 women and girls to safety. Ghazi retreated to a basement in the compound. He died there as the last surviving fighters battled around him.

More than 100 people were killed in the siege, including 10 commandos. The ISI — despite having a long relationship with the mosque and its leaders, as well as two informers inside providing intelligence — played a strangely ineffective role. In a cabinet meeting after the siege, ministers questioned a senior ISI official about the intelligence service's failure to prevent the militant action. "Who I meet in the evening and what I discuss is on your desk the next morning," one minister told the official. "How come you did not know what was happening a hundred meters from the ISI headquarters?" The official sat in silence as ministers thumped their desks in a gesture of agreement.

"One hundred percent they knew what was happening," a former cabinet minister who attended the meeting told me. The ISI allowed the militants to do what they wanted out of sympathy, he said. "The state is not as incompetent as people believe."

The Pakistani military faced an immediate and vicious backlash. In the months that followed, there were strikes against convoys of soldiers in the northwest and a wave of suicide bombings against government, military and civilian targets throughout the country, including the army's headquarters and the main ISI compound in Rawalpindi. After years of nurturing jihadists to fight its proxy wars, Pakistan was now experiencing the repercussions. "We could not control them," a former senior intelligence official told a colleague and me six months after the Red Mosque siege.

Yet even as the militants were turning against their masters, Pakistan's generals still sought to use them for their own purpose, most notoriously targeting Pakistan's first female prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, who was preparing to fly home from nearly a decade in exile in the fall of 2007. Bhutto had forged a deal with Musharraf that would allow him to resign as army chief but run for another term as president, while clearing the way for her to serve as prime minister. Elections were scheduled for early 2008.

Bhutto had spoken out more than any other Pakistani politician about the dangers of militant extremism. She blamed foreign militants for annexing part of Pakistan's territory and called for military operations into Waziristan. She declared suicide bombing un-Islamic and seemed to be challenging those who might target her. "I do not believe that any true Muslim will make an attack on me because Islam forbids attacks on women, and Muslims know that if they attack a woman, they will burn in hell," she said on the eve of her return.

She also promised greater cooperation with Afghanistan and the United States in combating terrorism and even suggested in an interview that she would give Western officials access to the man behind Pakistan's program of nuclear proliferation, A. Q. Khan.

President Karzai of Afghanistan warned Bhutto that his intelligence service had learned of threats against her life.

Informers had told the Afghans of a meeting of army commanders — Musharraf and his 10 most-powerful generals — in which they discussed a militant plot to have Bhutto killed.

On Oct. 18, 2007, Bhutto flew into Karachi. I was one of a crowd of journalists traveling with her. She wore religious amulets and offered prayers as she stepped onto Pakistani soil. Hours later, as she rode in an open-top bus through streets of chanting supporters, two huge bombs exploded, tearing police vans, bodyguards and party followers into shreds. Bhutto survived the blast, but some 150 people died, and 400 were injured.

Bhutto claimed that Musharraf had threatened her directly, and Karzai again urged her to take more precautions, asking his intelligence service to arrange an armored vehicle for her equipped with jammers to block the signals of cellphones, which are often used to detonate bombs. In the meantime, Bhutto pressed on with her campaign, insisting on greeting crowds of supporters from the open top of her vehicle.

In late December, a group of militants, including two teenage boys trained and primed to commit suicide bombings, arrived at the Haqqania madrasa in the northwestern town of Akora Khattak. The madrasa is a notorious establishment, housing 3,000 students in large, whitewashed residence blocks. Ninety-five percent of the Taliban fighting in Afghanistan have passed through its classrooms, a spokesman for the madrasa proudly told me. Its most famous graduate is Jalaluddin Haqqani, a veteran Afghan mujahedeen commander whose network has become the main instrument for ISI-directed attacks in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan.

The two young visitors who stopped for a night at the madrasa were escorted the next day to Rawalpindi, where Bhutto would be speaking at a rally on Dec. 27. As her motorcade left the rally, it slowed so she could greet supporters in the street. One of the two teenagers fired a pistol at her and then detonated his vest of explosives. Bhutto was standing in the roof opening of an armored S.U.V. She ducked into the vehicle at the sound of the gunfire, but the explosion threw the S.U.V. forward, slamming the edge of the roof hatch into the back of her head with lethal force. Bhutto slumped down into the vehicle, mortally wounded, and fell into the lap of her confidante and constant chaperone, Naheed Khan.

As Bhutto had long warned, a conglomeration of opponents wanted her dead and were all linked in some way. They were the same forces behind the insurgency in Afghanistan: Taliban and Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda, as well as the Pakistani military establishment, which included the top generals, Musharraf and Kayani. A United Nations Commission of Inquiry into the circumstances of

Bhutto's death found that each group had a motive and merited investigation.

Pakistani prosecutors later indicted Musharraf on charges of being part of a wider conspiracy to remove Bhutto from the political scene. There was "overwhelming circumstantial evidence" that he did not provide her with adequate security because he wanted to ensure her death in an inevitable assassination attempt, the chief state prosecutor in her murder trial, Chaudhry Zulfiqar Ali, told me. (Musharraf denied the accusations.) A hard-working, hard-charging man, Ali succeeded in having Musharraf arrested and was pushing to speed up the trial when he was shot to death on his way to work in May 2013.

Ali had no doubts that the mastermind of the plot to kill Bhutto was Al Qaeda. "It was because she was pro-American, because she was a strong leader and a nationalist," he told me. A Pakistani security official who interviewed some of the suspects in the Bhutto case and other militants detained in Pakistan's prisons came to the same conclusion. The decision to assassinate Bhutto was made at a meeting of the top council of Al Qaeda, the official said.

It took more than three years before the depth of Pakistan's relationship with Al Qaeda was thrust into the open and the world learned where Bin Laden had been hiding, just a few hundred yards from Pakistan's top military academy. In May 2011, I drove with a Pakistani colleague down a road in Abbottabad until we were stopped by the Pakistani military. We left our car and walked down a side street, past several walled houses and then along a dirt path until there it was: Osama bin Laden's house, a three-story concrete building, mostly concealed behind concrete walls as high as 18 feet, topped with rusting strands of barbed wire. This was where Bin Laden hid for nearly six years, and where, 30 hours earlier, Navy SEAL commandos shot him dead in a top-floor bedroom.

After a decade of reporting in Afghanistan and Pakistan and tracking Bin Laden, I was fascinated to see where and how he hid. He had dispensed with the large entourage that surrounded him in Afghanistan. For nearly eight years, he relied on just two trusted Pakistanis, whom American investigators described as a courier and his brother.

People knew that the house was strange, and one local rumor had it that it was a place where wounded Taliban from Waziristan recuperated. I was told this by Musharraf's former civilian intelligence chief, who had himself been accused of having a hand in hiding Bin Laden in Abbottabad. He denied any involvement, but he did not absolve local intelligence agents, who would have checked the house. All over the country, Pakistan's various intelligence agencies — the ISI, the Intelligence Bureau and Military Intelligence — keep safe houses for undercover operations. They use residential houses, often in quiet, secure neighborhoods, where they

lodge people for interrogation or simply enforced seclusion. Detainees have been questioned by American interrogators in such places and sometimes held for months. Leaders of banned militant groups are often placed in protective custody in this way. Others, including Taliban leaders who took refuge in Pakistan after their fall in Afghanistan in 2001, lived under a looser arrangement, with their own guards but also known to their Pakistani handlers, former Pakistani officials told me. Because of Pakistan's long practice of covertly supporting militant groups, police officers — who have been warned off or even demoted for getting in the way of ISI operations — have learned to leave such safe houses alone.

The split over how to handle militants is not just between the ISI and the local police; the intelligence service itself is compartmentalized. In 2007, a former senior intelligence official who worked on tracking members of Al Qaeda after Sept. 11 told me that while one part of the ISI was engaged in hunting down militants, another part continued to work with them.

Soon after the Navy SEAL raid on Bin Laden's house, a Pakistani official told me that the United States had direct evidence that the ISI chief, Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha, knew of Bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad. The information came from a senior United States official, and I guessed that the Americans had intercepted a phone call of Pasha's or one about him in the days after the raid. "He knew of Osama's whereabouts, yes," the Pakistani official told me. The official was surprised to learn this and said the Americans were even more so. Pasha had been an energetic opponent of the Taliban and an open and cooperative counterpart for the Americans at the ISI. "Pasha was always their blue-eyed boy," the official said. But in the weeks and months after the raid, Pasha and the ISI press office strenuously denied that they had any knowledge of Bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad.

Colleagues at The Times began questioning officials in Washington about which high-ranking officials in Pakistan might also have been aware of Bin Laden's whereabouts, but everyone suddenly clammed up. It was as if a decision had been made to contain the damage to the relationship between the two governments. "There's no smoking gun," officials in the Obama administration began to say.

The haul of handwritten notes, letters, computer files and other information collected from Bin Laden's house during the raid suggested otherwise, however. It revealed regular correspondence between Bin Laden and a string of militant leaders who must have known he was living in Pakistan, including Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a pro-Kashmiri group that has also been active in Afghanistan, and Mullah Omar of the Taliban. Saeed and Omar are two of the ISI's most important and loyal militant leaders. Both are protected by the agency. Both cooperate closely with it, restraining their followers from

attacking the Pakistani state and coordinating with Pakistan's greater strategic plans. Any correspondence the two men had with Bin Laden would probably have been known to their ISI handlers.

Bin Laden did not rely only on correspondence. He occasionally traveled to meet aides and fellow militants, one Pakistani security official told me. "Osama was moving around," he said, adding that he heard so from jihadi sources. "You cannot run a movement without contact with people." Bin Laden traveled in plain sight, his convoys always knowingly waved through any security checkpoints.

In 2009, Bin Laden reportedly traveled to Pakistan's tribal areas to meet with the militant leader Qari Saifullah Akhtar. Informally referred to as the "father of jihad," Akhtar is considered one of the ISI's most valuable assets. According to a Pakistani intelligence source, he was the commander accused of trying to kill Bhutto on her return in 2007, and he is credited with driving Mullah Omar out of Afghanistan on the back of a motorbike in 2001 and moving Bin Laden out of harm's way just minutes before American missile strikes on his camp in 1998. After the Sept. 11 attacks, he was detained several times in Pakistan. Yet he was never prosecuted and was quietly released each time by the ISI.

At his meeting with Bin Laden in August 2009, Akhtar is reported to have requested Al Qaeda's help in mounting an attack on the Pakistani army headquarters in Rawalpindi. Intelligence officials learned about the meeting later that year from interrogations of men involved in the attack. Information on the meeting was compiled in a report seen by all of the civilian and military intelligence agencies, security officials at the Interior Ministry and American counterterrorism officials.

At the meeting, Bin Laden rejected Akhtar's request for help and urged him and other militant groups not to fight Pakistan but to serve the greater cause — the jihad against America. He warned against fighting inside Pakistan because it would destroy their home base: "If you make a hole in the ship, the whole ship will go down," he said.

He wanted Akhtar and the Taliban to accelerate the recruitment and training of fighters so they could trap United States forces in Afghanistan with a well-organized guerrilla war. Bin Laden said that Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and the Indian Ocean region would be Al Qaeda's main battlefields in the coming years, and that he needed more fighters from those areas. He even offered naval training for militants, saying that the United States would soon exit Afghanistan and that the next war would be waged on the seas.

Akhtar, in his mid-50s, remains at large in Pakistan. He is still active in jihadi circles and in running madrasas — an example of a militant commander whom the ISI has struggled to control yet is too valuable for them to lock up or eliminate.

In trying to prove that the ISI knew of Bin Laden's whereabouts and protected him, I struggled for more than two

years to piece together something other than circumstantial evidence and suppositions from sources with no direct knowledge. Only one man, a former ISI chief and retired general, Ziauddin Butt, told me that he thought Musharraf had arranged to hide Bin Laden in Abbottabad. But he had no proof and, under pressure, claimed in the Pakistani press that he'd been misunderstood. Finally, on a winter evening in 2012, I got the confirmation I was looking for. According to one inside source, the ISI actually ran a special desk assigned to handle Bin Laden. It was operated independently, led by an officer who made his own decisions and did not report to a superior. He handled only one person: Bin Laden. I was sitting at an outdoor cafe when I learned this, and I remember gasping, though quietly so as not to draw attention. (Two former senior American officials later told me that the information was consistent with their own conclusions.) This was what Afghans knew, and Taliban fighters had told me, but finally someone on the inside was admitting it. The desk was wholly deniable by virtually everyone at the ISI — such is how supersecret intelligence units operate — but the top military bosses knew about it, I was told.

America's failure to fully understand and actively confront Pakistan on its support and export of terrorism is one of the primary reasons President Karzai has become so disillusioned with the United States. As American and NATO troops prepare to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of this year, the Pakistani military and its Taliban proxy forces lie in wait, as much a threat as any that existed in 2001.

In January 2013, I visited the Haqqania madrasa to speak with senior clerics about the graduates they were dispatching to Afghanistan. They agreed to let me interview them and gave the usual patter about it being each person's individual choice to wage jihad. But there was also continuing fanatical support for the Taliban. "Those who are against the Taliban, they are the liberals, and they only represent 5 percent of Afghans," the spokesman for the madrasa told me. He and his fellow clerics were set on a military victory for the Taliban in Afghanistan. Moreover, he said, "it is a political fact that one day the Taliban will take power. The white flag of the Taliban will fly again over Kabul, inshallah."

Pakistani security officials, political analysts, journalists and legislators warned of the same thing. The Pakistani military was still set on dominating Afghanistan and was still determined to use the Taliban to exert influence now that the United States was pulling out.

Kathy Gannon of The Associated Press reported in September that militants from Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, were massing in the tribal areas to join the Taliban and train for an anticipated offensive into Afghanistan this year. In Punjab, mainstream religious parties and banned militant groups were openly recruiting hundreds of students for jihad, and groups of young men were being

dispatched to Syria to wage jihad there. "They are the same jihadi groups; they are not 100 percent under control," a former Pakistani legislator told me. "But still the military protects them."

The United States was neither speaking out against Pakistan nor changing its policy toward a government that was exporting terrorism, the legislator lamented. "How many people have to die before they get it? They are standing by a military that protects, aids and abets people who are going against the U.S. and Western mission in Afghanistan, in Syria, everywhere."

When I remember the beleaguered state of Afghanistan in 2001, I marvel at the changes the American intervention has fostered: the rebuilding, the modernity, the bright graduates in every office. Yet after 13 years, more than a trillion dollars spent, 120,000 foreign troops deployed at the height of the war and tens of thousands of lives lost, Afghanistan's predicament has not changed: It remains a weak state, prey to the ambitions of its neighbors and extremist Islamists. This is perhaps an unpopular opinion, but to pull out now is, undeniably, to leave with the job only half-done.

Meanwhile, the real enemy remains at large.

Russia: Iran Nuke Talks May Suffer Over Ukraine

By George Jahn And Vladimir Isachenkov

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

VIENNA (AP) – U.S.-Russian tensions over Ukraine spilled over into nuclear talks with Iran Wednesday, with Moscow's chief envoy at the negotiations warning that his country may take "retaliatory measures" that could hurt attempts to persuade Tehran to cut back on programs that could make atomic arms.

The statement, by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, appeared to be the most serious threat of reprisal by Moscow for Western sanctions against Russia over its annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region.

Russia is key to attempts to coax Iran into significant long-term curbs of its nuclear program in exchange for relief from U.N. and other sanctions. Iran insists it does not want nuclear arms but is seeking a deal that will result in full sanctions relief.

The Russian threat, hours after the latest negotiating round ended, appeared to catch Washington off guard.

Days ahead of the meeting, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jennifer Psaki had said she expects Russia to "remain an active partner" in the talks. During the two-day talks, Western officials involved described Russia's participation as constructive and unchanged by the Ukraine tensions.

Ryabkov was cited by the Interfax news agency as saying Russia may feel compelled to respond to U.S. and European Union actions. He said Russia considers "reunification" with Crimea more important than the developments surrounding Iran's nuclear program.

"We wouldn't like to use these talks as an element of the game of raising the stakes taking into account the sentiments in some European capitals, Brussels and Washington," Ryabkov was quoted as saying. "But if they force us into that, we will take retaliatory measures here as well."

Russia and the U.S. often hold different positions about what Iran needs to do to banish fears about its nuclear activities. That includes uranium enrichment, which Iran says it needs to make reactor fuel – but which can also manufacture fissile warhead material.

Ahead of the most recent talks, diplomats told The Associated Press that Moscow was ready to accept a more robust Iranian enrichment program than Washington.

But American officials have always said that Russia and the United States are united in their goal of banishing the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, even if they differ on how to get there.

Iran has often tried to exploit U.S.-Russian differences and Ryabkov's comments could embolden it to resist significant nuclear cutbacks.

China usually supports Russia at the negotiations but the United States, Britain, France and Germany are unlikely to accept a lenient deal.

At worst, the talks could fall apart. That could embolden Israel to make good on threats to attack Iran's nuclear facilities and draw the United States into any military confrontation.

The Russian comments overshadowed signs that Iran may be ready to compromise.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had suggested earlier Wednesday his country was ready eliminate fears that a reactor it is building at Arak could be used to make atomic arms.

Zarif implied that Iran was open to re-engineering the facility to one that would produce less plutonium, according to the semi-official Fars news agency. Like enriched uranium, plutonium can be used to arm nuclear warheads.

While Iran insists on completing and running its nuclear reactor, "any proliferation concerns" linked to it "have to be removed," he was quoted as saying.

Ischachenkov reported from Moscow. Margaret Childs in Vienna and Associated Press writer Ali Akbar Dareini in Tehran contributed to this report.

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Ukraine Tensions Loom Over Iran Nuclear Talks

No Disruptions So Far, But Russia Warns It Might Raise Stakes in Clash With the West

By Laurence Norman

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Second Round Of Iran Nuclear Talks Ends With Optimism

By Alissa J. Rubin

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

VIENNA — The second round of talks between Iran and six world powers over Iran's nuclear program ended Wednesday with all parties expressing satisfaction with the discussions, which were the most detailed so far on each of the main issues dividing them.

Both Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign affairs chief and the chief negotiator for the six powers, and Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, described the talks as "useful and substantive."

Although neither offered details, a senior American official described the sessions as "intense" and said there were discussions of Iran's uranium enrichment program, the construction of a heavy water reactor at Arak that could be used to make plutonium into a fissile material, civilian cooperation on nuclear power and sanctions.

The talks, which started on Jan. 20 and are expected to last until July 20, are aimed at reaching a permanent agreement intended to ensure that Iran cannot develop a nuclear weapon and that if it continued to have a nuclear program, it would be for exclusively peaceful purposes.

Iran and the Western powers agreed in November in Geneva on a six-month schedule for concluding a permanent agreement. For the time being the West has offered Iran limited relief from sanctions in exchange for diluting the uranium it has enriched down to 3.5 percent from nearly 20 percent. Iran has been diluting its stock, according to the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency. That move is viewed by nuclear experts as a demonstration of Iran's seriousness about trying to reach a long-term agreement.

Uranium enriched to 90 percent can be used to make a nuclear weapon, and it takes just a few months to increase enrichment from 20 percent to 90 percent. However, if Iran were starting with only 3.5 percent enriched uranium, the process would take much longer.

Enrichment is at the heart of the disagreement between the two sides about Iran's program. Iran insists that its enrichment is for peaceful purposes, but intelligence from Western countries and unanswered questions about Iran's

program from the atomic agency, have raised questions about whether Iran has been honest about its intentions.

Negotiators from the United States are under pressure from Congress to take a hard line in the discussions. In a letter to President Obama signed by a bipartisan group of 83 senators, the lawmakers laid out their "core principles," which included that "Iran has no inherent right to enrichment under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty."

The treaty — of which Iran is a signatory — includes articles that allow countries to have civilian nuclear energy programs if they can also show that they will not use the program for military purposes.

The senators also said that Iran must give up its heavy water reactor at Arak and its Fordow enrichment facility.

In response to their letter, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran told a cabinet meeting that the country would never give up its right to enrichment, according to the official Iranian news service.

"The world has admitted that Iran is, and will be, among the countries which have nuclear technology, including enrichment, and there is no doubt about this for anyone," Mr. Rouhani said, according to the news service.

Despite the tough tone, there is room for an agreement such as one that allows very low levels of enrichment for civilian purposes and that includes a strict verification program, according to experts on Iran's technology.

The atmosphere inside the talks was flinty, but also serious and civil, according to the senior American official, who asked not to be named because of the delicacy of the negotiations.

"Everybody is very professional, very focused, no histrionics, no walking out, no yelling and screaming," the official added. "People understand the stakes are pretty profound; there is a sense of the tremendous responsibility on people's shoulders."

Although Russia is one of the nations involved in the talks, the tensions over Ukraine did not seem to affect the meetings this week, diplomats said.

The negotiators plan to return to Vienna on April 7 for further discussions.

Iran's Zarif Sees 'Signs' Nuclear Deal Can Be Reached

[AFP](#), March 20, 2014

Tehran (AFP) — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he saw "signs" Wednesday a long-term nuclear deal could be reached with major powers after the latest round of talks in Vienna.

"There are signs that an understanding is possible that respects the rights of the Iranian nation," the Fars news agency quoted Zarif as saying.

"It is planned that we start work during a meeting scheduled for the month of Ordibehesht (April 21 to May 21)... on drafting the text of an agreement," he said.

"That is to say we will have spent three months conducting comprehensive negotiations and will spend the next three months drawing up the final agreement."

Under an interim agreement Iran struck with the six powers in November, the two sides are aiming for a long-term deal by a July 20 target date.

The latest round of talks wrapped up on Wednesday, with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton describing them as "substantive and useful."

Zarif said he was "pleased" with the discussions so far on four key issues in any agreement – Iran's Arak heavy water reactor, its enrichment of uranium, civil nuclear cooperation and the lifting of Western sanctions.

"On the (lifting) of the sanctions, it seems that we are getting close to an agreed plan," Zarif said.

But he said there was no agreement on the Arak reactor which Western governments want to remain uncompleted for fear that its plutonium waste could give Iran an alternative route to a nuclear bomb.

"The Arak reactor is part of Iran's nuclear programme and will remain so. But if there are any concerns about the reactor, they should be addressed," he said.

Zarif said negotiations would continue at the experts level ahead of the next round of talks on April 7.

The six powers – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany – want Iran to reduce permanently, or at least for a long time, the scope of its nuclear activities in order to make it extremely difficult for it ever to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran has always denied any such ambition.

Iran, Six Powers Lock Horns Over Nuclear Reactor That Could Yield Plutonium

By Fredrik Dahl And Parisa Hafezi

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Hillary Clinton Says She Is 'personally Skeptical' About An Iran Nuclear Deal

By Philip Rucker

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

NEW YORK — Hillary Rodham Clinton cast doubt on the interim nuclear agreement with Iran, saying in a muscular policy speech here Wednesday night that she is "personally skeptical" that Iran's leaders will follow through on a comprehensive agreement to end their march toward nuclear weapons.

Still, the former secretary of state and potential 2016 Democratic presidential candidate told a pro-Israel audience in New York that she stands behind the Obama administration's negotiations with Iran, and she commended the work of her successor, John F. Kerry.

Clinton said the United States should "give space for diplomacy to work" and avoid imposing new unilateral sanctions or any other actions that might lead any allies to back out of existing international sanctions against Iran.

"The odds of reaching that comprehensive agreement are not good," Clinton said. "I am also personally skeptical that the Iranians would follow through and deliver. I have seen their behavior over the years. But this is a development that is worth testing."

If the negotiations with Iran fail, however, Clinton said the United States should explore "every other option."

"Let's be clear," she said, "every other option does remain on the table."

In a 30-minute address at an American Jewish Congress gala — where she was honored with a lifetime achievement award by actress Julianna Margulies and serenaded at the dinner table by Israeli singer Liel Kolet — Clinton presented herself as a tough defender of Israel in the Senate and at the State Department.

"When Americans of all faiths look at Israel, we see a homeland for a people long oppressed and a democracy that has to defend itself at every turn," Clinton said. "In Israel's story, we see our own."

Clinton described in detail her role in shaping the country's policies with regard to Iran from the earliest days of the Obama administration. This is likely to be a focus of her forthcoming memoir, due out this spring, which she teased in a separate speech earlier Wednesday.

Addressing the Association of American Publishers, Clinton said the book would cover challenges in the 21st century from Crimea to climate change. "Just another light summer read," she quipped.

She described her study at home as an episode of "Hoarders," with book notes and chapter drafts piled up all over. And she said her advisers, family and friends are vigorously debating the merits of her paragraphs.

Clinton is still mulling a title — although she joked that she was considering "The Scrunchie Chronicles: 112 Countries and It's Still All About My Hair," a winner from a reader contest last year in The Washington Post's "In the Loop" column.

In her book, Clinton will frame her State Department legacy and lay out her views on a range of important policy matters ahead of a potential presidential campaign.

Clinton said the book would be "about my experiences at the State Department, our rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world, and the challenges facing us in the 21st century."

The book will be Clinton's fourth, she said, although she noted, "It hasn't gotten any easier, at least for me, in producing a compelling personal narrative that tries to both captivate and educate along with inspire all at once."

When Clinton wrote her first memoir, "Living History," she was a senator and worked on the book in her spare time. After a full day's work in the Capitol, she said, she would come home and "stay up all hours in the night writing, editing and arguing" with her advisers and friends.

"This time I promised myself that it would be different," Clinton said. "I was leaving the State Department, stepping off that high wire of American diplomacy. There'd be no more interview requests, no frantic media speculation about my plans — just peace and quiet in our little old Chappaqua farmhouse, up in the attic where I hang out."

Then she deadpanned, "It has not exactly worked out that way."

Clinton's book has been hotly anticipated, and political groups have begun battling to define her tenure before she even finishes the manuscript.

Clinton said she is not writing on a computer — "I still write longhand" — and has produced "barrels and barrels of old drafts."

"In fact, if you see my study at home, you would think it was an episode from 'The Hoarders' — the notes, the pages, the drafts. It is amazing," Clinton said.

The reason she keeps her drafts, she said, is because when she wrote "It Takes a Village" as first lady, some reporters "claimed I never wrote anything in the book." To prove them wrong, she said, she had to reveal her paper drafts.

Clinton said that she has been relying heavily on her husband, former president Bill Clinton, and daughter, Chelsea, for editing and motivation. "The biggest challenge is deciphering my husband's writing when he decides to put his two cents in," she joked.

She also is getting help from editor Jonathan Karp, as well as Carolyn Reidy, president and chief executive of Simon & Schuster, which published her three previous titles.

Reidy, who chairs the Association of American Publishers, introduced Clinton at Wednesday's meeting before a couple hundred publishing executives.

"She writes her own books," Reidy said. "And, like all good authors, she works hard on each and every draft of her manuscript as she revises and then revises again, absorbing editorial suggestions."

As she mulls a title, Clinton joked, she has turned to the "In the Loop" reader contest in The Post for some suggestions.

"One possibility was 'It Takes a World,' a fitting sequel to 'It Takes a Village,'" Clinton said. "Another plays off my love of all things Tina Fey: 'Bossypantsuit,' although we can no longer say one of those words" (a reference Fey's 2011

book "Bossypants" — and Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg's recent campaign to ban the word "bossy").

Of the contest winner, "The Scrunchie Chronicles," Clinton said: "That actually is a keeper. That's on the short list."

NATIONAL NEWS

Barack Obama: No US "Military Excursion" To Come In Ukraine

By Jennifer Epstein

[Politico](#), March 20, 2014

President Barack Obama has ruled out U.S. military engagement with Russia over Ukraine, arguing Wednesday that it "would not be appropriate," or good for Ukraine, for the two powers to use force to work out the conflict.

"We are not going to be getting into a military excursion in Ukraine," the president said in an interview with NBC's San Diego affiliate, KNSD, one of several he did Wednesday. "What we are going to do is mobilize all of our diplomatic resources to make sure that we've got a strong international coalition that sends a clear message, which is that Ukraine should decide their destiny."

"There is a better path, but I think even the Ukrainians would acknowledge that for us to engage Russia militarily would not be appropriate, and would not be good for Ukraine either," the president said.

Obama said that he sees Russian President Vladimir Putin acting "out of weakness, not out of strength" in attempting to take control of Crimea. Putin, the president said, is "not comfortable" with former members of the Soviet Union making moves to align themselves with the West.

In another interview, with St. Louis NBC affiliate KSDK, Obama also said that a military option is not on the table.

"Obviously, you know, we do not need to trigger an actual war with Russia," he said. "The Ukrainians don't want that. Nobody would want that."

At this point, "one of the most important things we can do" is for Congress to pass a bill providing aid to Ukraine, he said, "at a time when they have an economic crisis to go along with this political crisis."

White House Tips Its Hand: Obama Not Actively Considering Military Force In Ukraine

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

The White House said Wednesday that President Obama is not actively considering military force as an option in the crisis in Ukraine.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said military action is "certainly not at the forefront of discussions" among the president and his top advisers, saying that Mr. Obama is

looking instead at imposing further economic sanctions against Russian leaders for the takeover of Crimea.

"You can expect further costs to be imposed on Russia," Mr. Carney said.

Some Republicans in Congress are calling for the U.S. to send military aid to Ukraine.

Mr. Carney said the president is very "clear-eyed" about his contentious relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin and said he has been from the start of his presidency.

"I don't think there's any question that relations between Russia and the West are not in a good place right now," Mr. Carney said.

Mr. Obama came into office touting his plans for a "reset" of U.S. relations with Russia. But those plans have deteriorated as Russia played an adversarial role with the administration on Syria, on Iran, on fugitive NSA leaker Edward Snowden and most recently with its takeover of the Crimea region of Ukraine.

"The intensity of the disagreements has increased, to be sure," Mr. Carney said.

U.S., European Allies To Step Up Sanctions On Russia

Western nations are planning tougher penalties to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin from moving troops into eastern Ukraine after annexing Crimea.

By Paul Richter And Sergei L. Loiko

[Los Angeles Times](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — Frustrated by the failure of Western sanctions and diplomacy to stop Russia from seizing Crimea, the Obama administration and its allies scrambled Wednesday to devise new and tougher economic penalties in hope of preventing President Vladimir Putin from moving forces into Ukraine's eastern territory.

A day after Putin signed a treaty to annex Crimea, U.S. officials acknowledged that Ukraine has lost the region. Pro-Russia forces seized control of two Ukrainian naval bases in the Black Sea peninsula on Wednesday, including the naval headquarters in Sevastopol. They were seen replacing Ukraine's flag with the Russian tricolor.

Ukraine's interim leaders in Kiev said they were making plans to evacuate their outnumbered military personnel from Crimea and to seek United Nations support to turn the disputed region into a demilitarized zone. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will meet with Putin in Moscow on Friday before flying to Kiev.

Moscow's military takeover in Crimea has created a tense divide between Europe and Russia, which is increasingly isolated. U.S. and European officials worry that if they fail to halt Putin, security may be at risk in Eastern Europe as well as parts of Central Asia with large ethnic Russian populations.

President Obama, who is heading to Europe on a long-scheduled trip Monday, said in TV interviews that he does not plan to launch "a military excursion" in Ukraine. But Obama told the KSDK television channel in St. Louis that the United States and its allies are ready to take "even more disruptive economic actions" against Russia.

"Obviously, we do not need to trigger an actual war with Russia," he said. "The Ukrainians don't want that. Nobody would want that."

Speaking to the KNND station in San Diego, he said, "What we are going to do is mobilize all of our diplomatic resources to make sure that we've got a strong international coalition that sends a clear message, which is that Ukraine should decide their destiny."

U.S. officials aim to announce stiffer economic punishments as early as Thursday in response to what they call an illegal land grab by the Kremlin. The leaders of the European Union will meet in Brussels and are likely to coordinate new sanctions with the White House.

U.S. officials say they have legal authority to penalize officials in the chain of command in Russia and are considering sanctions on Putin's inner circle of advisors, Russia's most important state-owned enterprises and its defense industry and banks.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said officials have an "expansive range of potential designations for sanctions, including Russian government officials, the arms sector of Russia and individuals who, while not holding positions within the Russian government, have influence over or provide material support to senior Russian government officials."

The penalties that were announced Monday were far less onerous, targeting about two dozen mid-level Russian and Ukrainian officials with travel bans and asset freezes. The administration had hoped going easy would leave space for a possible diplomatic solution, so it did not target major parts of the economy or key decision makers.

"It's clear that sanctions against a few individuals didn't work," said a senior administration official, who asked to remain unidentified in discussing sensitive diplomacy. "We have to get much tougher to make sure Putin doesn't go further."

Europe appeared to be split into three camps.

Poland, the Baltic states, Sweden and the Netherlands are deeply alarmed by Putin's moves and want strong action. Britain, France and Germany have strong economic ties to Russia but are leaning toward a tougher position, convinced that inaction would set a dangerous precedent.

Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus and Bulgaria, which depend on Russian energy and trade, may resist much stiffer penalties, however, wary that they could boomerang and cause higher prices and political turmoil at home. "They feel

their position is just too weak to take this on,” said a European official.

Moscow said any expansion of sanctions is “unacceptable and will not remain without consequences.”

U.S. officials are considering providing limited military aid to Ukraine, as a symbolic expression of support for the interim government that was formed when Russian-backed President Viktor Yanukovich fled to Russia last month after a popular uprising. The aid could include what was described as small arms — typically pistols and assault rifles, plus ammunition — worth \$25 million or less, the administration official said.

One U.S. military official said he doubted the White House would approve arms shipments, however, because Russia could see it as highly provocative.

“I don’t foresee any appetite for lethal [aid] right now,” he said.

Both European and U.S. officials have been startled by Putin’s indifference to their efforts to restrain his actions in Ukraine.

Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, among others, have spent hours talking to Putin on the telephone in recent weeks, urging him to relent, and promising Russia greater involvement in Ukraine as its new government takes shape. U.S. officials also sought to establish back channel communications with Putin’s inner circle in hope of influencing him.

But Putin ignored the leaders’ entreaties, including their pleas that he at least leave the Crimea peninsula in a sort of legal limbo rather than moving to annex it two days after a hastily organized referendum on secession that the West said was illegal.

Russian news agencies on Wednesday cited Constitutional Court Chairman Valery Zorkin as saying the treaty signed by Putin has been ruled valid, thus clearing the way for Moscow to annex Crimea. The treaty now requires ratification by the Russian parliament.

On Friday, Secretary of State John F. Kerry flew to London and spent seven hours with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. But Lavrov, it turned out, didn’t have authorization from Putin to negotiate on Ukraine.

Putin’s signing of annexation papers at a ceremony Tuesday in Moscow was “a slap in the face,” said Eugene Rumer, director of Russian studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “He was saying, ‘I’m doing a victory lap — you can join me.’”

A senior European official acknowledged that a month into the Ukraine crisis, “there still seems to be no solution in sight.”

Obama: No Military Action In Ukraine

By Jeremy Herb

[The Hill](#), March 20, 2014

President Obama said Wednesday that the U.S. military would not take military action in Ukraine against Russia.

“We are not going to be getting into a military excursion in Ukraine,” Obama said in an interview Wednesday with KNSD, the NBC affiliate in San Diego.

“I think even the Ukrainians would acknowledge, for us to engage Russia militarily would not be appropriate and would not be good for Ukraine, either,” Obama added.

The White House has said that it is focused on providing economic aid to Ukraine and enacting sanctions against Russia. But it has not provided military aid requested by the Ukrainian government beyond military rations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin this week signed a treaty that annexed Crimea as part of Russia, a move that was condemned by the United States and the West.

The Obama administration issued sanctions against 11 individuals from Russia and Ukraine on Monday in response to Russia’s military intervention, and Obama has indicated that further sanctions could be on the way.

“What we are going to be do is mobilize all of our diplomatic resources to make sure that we’ve got a strong international coalition that sends a strong message,” Obama said Wednesday.

US Army Will Exercise In Ukraine This Summer

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) – The Pentagon says it will participate as planned in a multinational military exercise this summer in Ukraine.

Dubbed “Rapid Trident,” the ground maneuvers have been held annually for a number of years with forces from Britain and other NATO countries as well as Ukraine, which has a partner relationship with NATO but is not a member.

The Pentagon says it has no details on the number of U.S. forces expected to participate.

A spokesman, Army Col. Steven Warren, says Rapid Trident is the only Ukraine exercise the U.S. military plans to participate in this year. The exercise is intended to help the Ukrainian military improve its ability to operate with NATO forces.

Last year’s Rapid Trident was held in July and lasted two weeks. Land forces from 17 countries participated.

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Analysis: Russia Tests Obama Foreign Policy Tools

By Julie Pace

[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) – For President Barack Obama, Russia's aggressive annexation of Crimea is testing central tenets of his foreign policy philosophy: his belief in the power of direct diplomacy, his preference for using economic sanctions as punishment and his inclination to proceed cautiously in order to avoid creating larger long-term problems.

The question facing the White House now is whether actions that have done little to stop Russia from claiming Crimea are tough enough to stop further escalations by Moscow. And if they continue to prove insufficient, what else is Obama willing to do to change Vladimir Putin's calculus?

The menu of additional options appears limited. The White House says a military response is not being considered, and officials have so far resisted calls to supply Ukraine's fledgling government with military equipment. Instead, the U.S. is likely to focus on financial assistance to Ukraine and deepening economic sanctions against Russian officials whom the White House deems responsible for the crisis.

White House spokesman Jay Carney vowed Wednesday that "more action will be taken." He indicated that financial penalties could spread to the Russian arms sector, wealthy oligarchs and additional Kremlin officials.

And Vice President Joe Biden, trying to soothe concerns in nations on Russia's borders, said in Lithuania that the U.S. will respond to any aggression against its NATO allies. He declared, "We're in this together with you."

But thus far, sanctions levied by both the U.S. and the European Union have done little to deter Russian President Putin. Nor have Obama's direct appeals to Putin in four lengthy phone calls or his efforts to isolate Russia internationally by rallying allies to suspend preparations for the economic summit Putin was scheduled to host this summer.

"We have gotten ourselves backed into a pretty bad corner," says Rosa Brooks, an international law professor at Georgetown University who served in the Pentagon during Obama's first term. "Putin quite correctly calculated that there's really not much we can do."

Almost every punishment or warning from the U.S. has been followed by defiance from the Russian leader. Hours after the U.S. and EU imposed their first round of asset freezes and other sanctions against Russian and Ukrainian officials, Putin formally recognized Crimea's independence from Ukraine. The following day, he signed a treaty making Crimea Russian territory.

"If you push a spring too hard, at some point it will spring back," the Russian leader said in a fiery speech Tuesday. "You always need to remember this."

The crisis in Crimea has become a flashpoint in a new dispute between East and West. Russia moved troops into the peninsula after Ukraine's Kremlin-backed president fled

the capital of Kiev amid rallies protesting his decision to abandon plans for deepening ties with Europe. On Sunday, voters in Crimea overwhelmingly cast ballots in favor of joining Russia. On Wednesday, Russian forces seized military installations across Crimea.

The White House has decried Russia's maneuvers as a violation of international law and does not recognize Moscow's annexation of Crimea.

Putin's actions have opened Obama to fresh criticism from Republicans, who argue that the second-term president, already politically weakened at home, now looks wobbly on the world stage.

Republican Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina have called on Obama to provide military assistance to Ukraine in the form of small arms and ammunition, as well as non-lethal assistance to the government in Kiev.

"The West must impose real costs on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. By failing to do so, we only invite further aggression elsewhere," the two senators said in a statement.

Other lawmakers, including Virginia Rep. Eric Cantor have called on the U.S. and its international partners to revoke Russia's membership in the Group of Eight. Cantor, the No. 2 Republican in the House, also urged the administration to increase energy exports to weaken what he called Russia's "stranglehold" on oil and gas supplies to Ukraine and much of Europe.

Administration officials privately acknowledge there is little chance Putin will give up Crimea, a strategically important peninsula that has long housed a Russian military base. Instead, the most pressing U.S. concerns are now cooling tensions in Crimea, where both Ukraine and Russia have troops, and preventing Putin from pushing into areas of eastern Ukraine that have similarly pro-Russian populations.

Secretary of State John Kerry said any further Russian incursion into eastern Ukraine would be a "major breach." But he declined to give specifics on how the U.S. would respond.

Even as the U.S. and Europe talk tough, there are practical concerns on both sides of the Atlantic that are likely to factor into future decisions about punishing Russia.

European nations, including powerful Germany, have deep economic ties to Russia and fear Putin could retaliate financially if the EU ordered tougher sanctions. The U.S. is also dependent on Russia keeping open supply routes the Pentagon is using to withdraw from Afghanistan, and relies on Putin's cooperation on an agreement to strip Syria of its chemical weapons stockpiles.

And perhaps most pressing for Obama is Russia's partnership in tense international negotiations with Iran, which are aimed at blunting the Islamic republic's nuclear program.

The Russians aren't interested in easing those concerns. A top Russian diplomat told the Interfax news

agency Wednesday that Moscow may revise its stance in the nuclear talks in response to actions taken by the U.S. and Europe.

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Biden Meets Baltic Leaders, Pledges Support

By Roberta Rampton

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

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In Eastern Europe, Biden Finds Allies Anxious About Russia, Uncertain Of US Commitment

By Scott Wilson

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Vice President Biden's we're-all-in-this-together tour of Eastern Europe, a two-country stop that concluded here Wednesday, highlighted not only the growing regional anxieties over Russia's designs on Ukraine — but also how much work the Obama administration has to do to convince allies of its support.

At its core, Biden's message here and in Poland was a simple reaffirmation of what one senior administration official called a "bedrock commitment": The United States would honor NATO's basic premise that if one member nation is attacked, all would come to its defense.

"President Obama and I view Article 5 of the NATO Treaty as an absolutely solemn commitment which we will honor," Biden said in an appearance with Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, referring to the collective self-defense clause in the agreement. "We will honor."

Russia, he said, was on a "dark path" that would lead to its isolation.

A timely message, perhaps, as Russian President Vladimir Putin celebrated Crimea's return to Russia through an annexation that the Obama administration and its European allies have called illegal. But having to deliver the message at all is a measure of how uncertain Eastern Europe remains as it confronts an expansionist Russia — and how uncertain many leaders here are of the Obama administration's intentions to help.

In some ways, the anxieties are the inevitable result of the United States' military retrenchment after more than a decade of war.

Nations through history have seen their power tested in post-war periods — from Israel leaving the Sinai after the hopeful Camp David peace accords and into a war in southern Lebanon a few years later, to the U.S. experience in Korea soon after World War II.

For Obama, who will meet with European leaders next week, the concerns here are also rooted in policy, tone and contrast with Putin's brash nationalism.

Obama believed on taking office that it was his predecessor's go-it-alone approach, particularly in Iraq, that worried America's traditional allies in Europe and beyond.

The United States had become unpredictable under George W. Bush, the president argued early in his administration, and re-energizing alliances such as NATO, the Group of Eight and the Group of 20, and a variety of Asian regional forums would convince allies that the new administration intended to act in partnership, not on its own.

To a degree, it has worked, perhaps most vividly in the international military effort that helped depose Libyan ruler Moammar Gaddafi.

But as Putin has acted alone, those living in the old Soviet neighborhood are, again, looking for the assertive American hand that often defined its role throughout the decades of the Cold War.

Ilves, a Swedish-born, American-educated former academic, said in his appearance with Biden that Russia's intervention is "forcing us to reassess the assumptions of the past 20, 25 years."

"The old idea of NATO, which I remember from 20 years ago, out of the area or out of business, predicated on a Europe that no longer has any threats — that, unfortunately, has turned out, with the actions we've seen against Ukraine, to no longer apply," he said. "The East-West relationship needs to be put on a new standing."

At the grand Presidential Palace here in the lovely old district of Vilnius, Biden held a series of meetings Wednesday with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite and Latvian President Andris Berzins, who flew in for the sessions.

"Russia cannot escape that the world is changing and rejecting outright their behavior," Biden said. "And that there is a price to pay for naked aggression."

Both leaders thanked the United States for its "decisive steps" after Russia's intervention in Ukraine and warned that the move had upended the "architecture" that has governed European security for the last few decades.

Biden delivered the same message throughout: The United States, deeply concerned by what Biden called Putin's "land grab" in Crimea, will defend NATO as an institution and its member states if they become targets.

But in many ways, the visit itself was the message. Grybauskaite used the term "symbolic" to describe it before meeting with the vice president.

Beyond spine-stiffening pep talks — and some aspirational discussions about weaning Eastern Europe from Russian natural gas — Biden pledged very little of substance during the trip. He highlighted recent U.S. military contributions to Poland's defense, a dozen U.S. F-16 fighter aircraft. The administration also has increased by 10 aircraft

its contribution to the Baltic air policing program, another step Biden noted.

But those planes will leave with the United States as early as next month when it rotates out as the NATO partner to the Baltic nations for the air policing effort. Poland will replace the United States in that role, casting doubt on whether the increased air patrol will continue beyond then.

A senior administration official traveling with Biden, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the meetings, said there is an assumption that once the United States rotates out of the program “an equal number of planes from allies will rotate in.”

“We have strong reason to believe that that is what will happen, that the continued elevated level of aircraft stationed in the Baltics will persist beyond the time of our deployment,” the official said. “If for whatever reason that changes, obviously, we’ll take a close look at making sure that that number stays elevated.”

On the issue of energy, Biden and the Eastern European leaders he met with discussed ways of both expanding their own energy sources and in helping Ukraine if need be.

Those ideas ranged over the short and long terms — from Poland easing regulations to allow faster development of its shale gas to future European pipelines that would lessen reliance on Russia.

Beyond reiterating a previous pledge to expand U.S. liquefied natural gas exports to the region, Biden offered ideas, future technical support and encouragement.

In Warsaw, where Biden posed before a banner celebrating the Solidarity movement, President Bronislaw Komorowski said he reminded the vice president of the 1980s and his own view of what contained Soviet aggression.

“What happened in those days that was helpful was a change in Russian oil and gas prices,” said Komorowski, a former Polish defense minister.

He then added, “Combined with the arms race.”

When it was his turn to speak, Biden said, “You have an ally whose budget is larger than the next 10 nations in the world combined.”

“So don’t worry about where we are,” he said.

Biden Warns Of Moscow’s ‘naked Aggression’ As Crimea Crisis Deepens

Pro-Russian forces storm Ukrainian naval site on peninsula

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

As pro-Russian forces stormed a Ukrainian naval base in the breakaway region of Crimea, Vice President Joseph R. Biden warned Wednesday that Moscow would pay a price for “naked aggression.”

“We stand resolutely with our Baltic allies in support of the Ukrainian people and against Russian aggression,” Mr. Biden said as he wrapped up two days of talks in the Baltic states about the crisis. “As long as Russia proceeds along this dark path, they will receive increasing political and economic isolation.”

Mr. Biden assured the leaders of Latvia and Lithuania that the U.S. is committed to protecting its NATO allies. Both of the NATO members are former Soviet satellite states, and both have significant ethnic Russian minority populations within their borders.

Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė said the situation in Ukraine is “alarming.”

“We reject the use of brutal force to redraw the map of Europe and to undermine the post-war political order,” he said. “We must take all the necessary measures to insure security in Europe and the Baltic region.”

Latvian President Andris Bērziņš said the U.S. and its allies must aid Ukraine immediately, politically and economically.

As he prepared to return to Washington, Mr. Biden said Russian President Vladimir Putin is confronting a world united against his Cold-War view of expansion.

“Russia cannot escape that the world is changing and rejecting outright their behavior, ... and that there is a price to pay for naked aggression,” Mr. Biden said.

While the vice president was engaged in talks, pro-Russian forces were taking over the naval headquarters of Ukraine in the Crimean peninsula, which voted to break away from Ukraine Sunday. Mr. Putin signed a treaty on Tuesday with Crimean leaders enabling the region to join the Russian Federation.

The White House said later that Russia’s takeover of the Ukrainian naval base is “creating a dangerous situation.”

“We condemn these actions,” said White House press secretary Jay Carney. “We are prepared to impose further costs on Russia. “He said the administration is urging Russia to begin talks immediately with Ukraine to defuse the crisis.

The Obama administration has imposed sanctions against 11 Russian and former Ukrainian officials in response to the crisis and has warned of more sanctions to come.

With Russia, As With China, Unnerved US Allies Seek Reassurances

By Mark Landler

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. found himself in a fraught but familiar place this week: holding the hands of American allies fearful of being bullied by a larger, aggressive neighbor.

This time, it was Poland and the Baltic states, rattled by Russia’s move to annex Crimea and its potential designs on

the rest of Ukraine. Three months ago, it was Japan and South Korea, unnerved by China's sudden imposition of an air defense zone in the East China Sea.

The cases differ in obvious respects: the tensions in Asia have eased somewhat after the Chinese government showed prudence in policing its air defense zone, while in Europe, the confrontation with Russia over Crimea seems to be only escalating.

But there are also striking parallels: Russia and China are both ambitious powers, riding a tide of nationalism and nursing grievances over historical slights at the hands of the West.

Both may be exploiting a belief that the United States is turning inward, exhausted by years of war and reluctant to get drawn into costly foreign entanglements.

And both are led by self-confident strongmen — Vladimir V. Putin and Xi Jinping — though the popularly elected Mr. Putin may have a tighter grip on his society than the Communist Party boss, Mr. Xi, who must contend with an independent-minded military.

For President Obama, deciphering the motives, means and next moves of these suspicious giants will require a mix of psychology and geopolitics. Kremlinology and Sinology may end up as the major foreign policy preoccupations of the remainder of his presidency.

So far, the administration's response to the threats has been similar: to emphasize the ironclad treaty commitment of the United States to its allies and to offer measured displays of force: sending a pair of B-52 bombers to fly through the contested Chinese airspace; giving the Baltic states 10 more fighter jets to patrol their skies.

"We stand resolutely with our Baltic allies in support of the Ukrainian people and against Russian aggression," Mr. Biden said after meeting in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, with the country's president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, and President Andris Berzins of Latvia.

"As long as Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing economic and political isolation," he said.

For now, administration officials say, Russia presents a harder case than China. Mr. Putin has been brazen in his takeover of Crimea and troubling in his assertion that Russia will protect Russian-speaking populations in the nations that ring his country, while Mr. Xi has only inched forward with Beijing's territorial claims in the South and East China Seas.

Russia has shrugged off European and American sanctions, and ridiculed assertions that it is flouting international law, while China appeared to heed widespread condemnation and Mr. Biden's show of solidarity with American allies after it imposed its air defense zone.

China has yet to impose a second such zone over the South China Sea, as many in the region had predicted it would. American military commanders say the Chinese Air Force has been prudent in patrolling the zone, allaying fears

of a miscalculation if Chinese fighter jets were scrambled to intercept a Japanese plane flying through it.

None of this is to suggest that the tensions in Asia have ebbed. A simmering confrontation between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea flared up recently when Chinese ships turned away Philippine ships trying to deliver supplies to a small military detachment.

American officials still live in fear that China will land troops on the Senkaku Islands, which it claims under the name Diaoyu Islands, but which are controlled by Japan. The United States would be obligated by treaty terms to defend Japan in a military clash with China. And the concerns about China's muscle-flexing are not limited to these islands.

"China's military is expanding dramatically, creating concern for a host of American allies," said Ian Bremmer, founder of the Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy. He said he viewed China as a greater threat than Russia, "and by a very large margin."

The United States can draw comfort from the fact that Mr. Xi's overriding goal, experts say, is to maintain stability outside China's borders so he can manage a host of problems at home, including a slowing economy and tensions over official corruption.

Indeed, China has expressed qualms about Mr. Putin's adventurism. Normally a stalwart ally of Russia in the United Nations, it declined on Saturday to oppose a Security Council resolution rejecting the referendum for secession in Crimea, abstaining instead.

For all of Mr. Putin's bluster, some experts doubt that he would risk a wider conflict.

"Putin is also rational and respects U.S. power," said R. Nicholas Burns, a former undersecretary of state who teaches at Harvard. "It is very unlikely he would threaten a NATO ally such as Estonia, Latvia or Poland due to NATO's security guarantee."

Mr. Burns said the president should draw clear red lines with Russia and China and show that the United States was prepared to defend its treaty obligations. That was the main purpose of Mr. Biden's visit this week, with his mantra-like repetition of Article V, the clause of the NATO treaty that commits members to regard an armed attack on any one of them to be an attack on all.

It is also worth remembering, Mr. Bremmer said, that Russia has been losing influence steadily for 20 years, "demographically, diplomatically, economically and militarily."

Mr. Putin's actions, he said, are evidence more of insecurity than of strength.

Robert Danin, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said: "Russia is a traditional military power sitting atop a declining economic and industrial base. In contrast, China is a military power rooted in a strong and growing economic foundation."

That may explain why Mr. Obama, after meeting with European allies in Brussels next week, will travel a month later to Asia. There, he will follow in Mr. Biden's footsteps with a tour of China's anxious neighbors: Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Another Outlandish Bidenism: I Led Senate Push For NATO To Add Poland

By Cheryl K. Chumley

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

Vice president Joseph R. Biden uncorked his latest head-scratcher while visiting Warsaw — claiming he used his chairman post on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to lead Poland to join NATO.

Only he didn't.

Mr. Biden chaired the committee between 2001 and 2003. Poland, on the other hand, joined with NATO in 1999.

But Mr. Biden said, The Hill reported: "Fifteen years ago, I was honored, as the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, to lead the fight for Poland's admission into NATO."

The remark came while Mr. Biden was visiting Warsaw to settle Polish nerves over Russia's assault on Ukraine.

So who did head up the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when Poland joined NATO?

That would be former Sen. Jesse Helms, the now-deceased Republican from South Carolina, who actually started floor debate about the issue, Bloomberg first reported.

Mr. Biden did, however, take the reins on bringing Democrats into the fold and to sign onto the treaty resolution that Mr. Helms forged — the one that included Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic and that ultimately led to all three entering into union with NATO, Bloomberg reported.

NATO Chief Calls Russia's Actions Grave Threat To Europe's Security

By Michael R. Gordon

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — The NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said on Wednesday that Russia's military intervention was the "gravest threat" to European security since the end of the Cold War.

"This is a wake-up call, for the Euro-Atlantic community, for NATO and for all those committed to a Europe whole, free and at peace," Mr. Rasmussen said in a speech at the Brookings Institution on Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. Rasmussen conferred here Tuesday evening with Secretary of State John Kerry, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Susan Rice, President Obama's national security adviser.

Mr. Rasmussen said that the Russian intervention was serious for three reasons: the size of it, the fact that it affected

a nation of 45 million and because the crisis was right on NATO's doorstep.

"We had thought that such behavior had been confined to history, but it's back and it's dangerous because it violates international norms of accepted behavior," he said.

Mr. Rasmussen said that the alliance had put the range of NATO cooperation with Russia under review and had suspended its plans to escort Russian ships that are ferrying chemical weapons stocks from Syria. The alliance has also canceled staff-level meetings between NATO and Russian officials, though it has kept the door open to political dialogue at senior levels.

NATO foreign ministers are to meet in early April, and further decisions will be taken then, he said.

"Russia was among those who committed in 1994 to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty," he said. "Russia pledged not to threaten or use force against Ukraine. By turning its back on that agreement, Russia has called into question its credibility and reliability as an international actor. And any steps to annex Crimea would be in clear violation of the United Nations Charter."

He called on Russia to stop all military activities that threatened Ukraine, commit itself to a political solution and engage in direct talks with the government of Ukraine.

Russia's Moves In Ukraine Are "Wake-Up Call," NATO's Rasmussen Says In Speech

By Karen DeYoung

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

Russia's aggression in Ukraine is a "wake-up call" for the Atlantic military alliance and other international institutions that have buttressed European security and stability for decades, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Wednesday.

"We live in a different world than we did less than a month ago," Rasmussen said in a previously scheduled Brookings Institution speech that was adjusted to reflect a sudden crisis that he called Europe's "gravest threat . . . since the end of the Cold War."

How NATO and its 28 individual members respond to the new world Rasmussen outlined is likely to determine whether the challenges that have plagued the alliance almost since its inception are eased or aggravated.

Many of those challenges — American dominance, unequal burden-sharing, defense budget woes — were somewhat subdued during NATO's first four decades, when the United States was ready and eager to lead on the front lines of the Cold War.

But since the 1991 demise of the Soviet Union, with interruptions for joint action in places such as Bosnia, Afghanistan and Libya, those problems have dominated virtually every high-level NATO meeting.

President Obama, who told a San Diego television station Wednesday that “we are not going to be getting into a military excursion in Ukraine,” came to office with a commitment to build stronger international institutions. But all three of his defense secretaries, from Robert M. Gates to Leon Panetta to Chuck Hagel, have alternately berated and pleaded with Europe to increase defense spending.

“America’s contributions in NATO remain starkly disproportionate, so adjustments in the U.S. defense budget cannot become an excuse for further cuts” in Europe, Hagel told his European counterparts in a closed-door session last month in Brussels just after he announced new decreases in U.S. spending.

The strategic plan that NATO adopted in 2010 called for increased spending on capabilities, including cyberwarfare, intelligence and surveillance. Yet in 2013, only a handful of NATO countries other than the United States, including Estonia, Greece and Britain, achieved the alliance’s defense spending goal of 2 percent of gross domestic product, and many weren’t even close.

Britain and France, which reached 1.9 percent in 2013 according to NATO figures, have announced major cuts this year, leading to new charges from U.S. critics that Europe continues to seek a “free ride” from the United States.

“I am the first to stress that Europe must do more,” Rasmussen said. “Developments in Ukraine are a stark reminder that security in Europe cannot be taken for granted.”

At NATO’s upcoming September summit in Britain, he said, “we need to take tough decisions” to demonstrate that “our commitment to the security of allies is unbreakable.”

At the same time, Rasmussen argued, NATO is not entirely a one-way street that the United States has built, paved and continues to maintain.

“Over the past 10 years, for every two U.S. soldiers who have served in Afghanistan, one European soldier has always served with them,” totaling 400,000, he said.

NATO countries continue to keep the peace in Kosovo, and in NATO’s 2011 Libya operation, “European allies, Canada and NATO partners played a crucial role in enforcing an arms embargo, maintaining a no-fly zone and protecting the people from attacks by their own leader,” Rasmussen said.

“It comes down to a simple truth: Shared security is better than solitary insecurity. And it’s cheaper, too,” he said. NATO, he added, is “a great deal for America. And it’s why NATO matters to America.”

Others have argued that some of those missions provided as much evidence of NATO dysfunction as they did of equality and cooperation. Although the United States quickly pulled back to let others take the lead in Libya, the operation revealed significant shortfalls in European capabilities. Although NATO agreed by consensus to participate, a number of countries declined, leading to

charges that the alliance had become an “a la carte” organization.

In Afghanistan, caveats by individual nations on what kinds of combat and other missions they were prepared to undertake led to significant U.S. frustration.

“The irony is that the alliance has been focusing a lot in the last decade on threats outside of Europe,” said Stephen Larrabee, an European security expert at the Rand Corporation.

The question now is whether a return to a more direct threat to Europe, “right on NATO’s border,” as Rasmussen put it, will focus minds and open pocketbooks.

“This is a time where it ought to be a little easier for parliaments and government to make the case that a decade and a half of underinvestment in defense needs to come to an end,” said Ivo Daalder, president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, who served as Obama’s ambassador to NATO for four years.

“I would hope that we spend a lot of time making clear that’s what we expect them to do,” Daalder said. “We’ve done that for many years and gotten nowhere.”

Larrabee was pessimistic. “There will be a lot of talk,” he said, “but I’d be surprised if you see much action.”

Ukraine has also raised new questions about the massive expansion NATO underwent after the fall of the Soviet Union. After a long debate in the early 1990s about moving eastward, the decade between 1999 and 2009 brought 12 new countries aboard.

Four others — Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Georgia — have expressed interest in joining.

Retired Adm. James G. Stavridis, who served as supreme allied commander of NATO from 2009 until 2013, said the crisis is likely to have a “salutary effect” on financial commitments NATO members have made but failed to keep. Overall, he said, Russia’s actions in Ukraine stand to boost the alliance’s relevance and jolt its politics, especially among its newer members in the east “who quite vividly remember being under the Russians. They’re nervous,” he said.

During a visit this week from Vice President Biden, however, Baltic leaders seemed to rest their hopes squarely on the United States and praised what Latvian President Andris Berzins called Biden’s “unwavering reassurance.”

Goodbye, Russia; Hello Again, Cold War-Era Group Of Seven

By Ben Wolfgang

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

Russia’s relatively brief foray into the world’s most exclusive club of rich nations has been undone in just a few weeks, and Moscow increasingly finds itself in Cold War-style isolation.

The U.S. and its allies have all but kicked Russia out of the vaunted Group of Eight, comprised of the world's top economic powerhouses with origins dating back to the early 1970s. The G-8 has, at least temporarily, reverted to its incarnation before Russia joined in 1998.

The resurgent Group of Seven — the U.S., the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Canada and Italy — will meet next week in the Netherlands to discuss how to respond to Russia's military incursion into Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's "naked aggression," as Vice President Joseph R. Biden described it Wednesday, puts at risk the years of post-Soviet progress Russia has made toward normalized relations with the West, analysts say.

Joining the G-8 marked a major turning point in Russian-Western relations. For Moscow, it looked to be a sign that the 21st century would be a period of reconciliation and partnership with other world leaders. For the West, it was an olive branch to Russia, an attempt to leave behind the geopolitics of the past millennium.

But for Mr. Putin, who repeatedly has bemoaned the demise of the Soviet empire and at times shown little interest in G-8 gatherings, the benefits of greater influence over Ukraine and other nations in the region may outweigh the consequences of isolation.

"I think he's made a decision. The G-8 is a forum where governments get together to discuss things. [Not being there] is one less photo op, but I'm sure President Putin has made the calculation that his best photo op is as the guy who brought Crimea back into Russia," said William E. Pomeranz, deputy director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

After Russia's move into the Crimean Peninsula — which voted Sunday to secede from Ukraine and join Russia — the U.S. and the rest of the G-7 immediately suspended plans to attend a G-8 meeting in Sochi in June. The announcement had little impact on Mr. Putin, who has sent more troops into Crimea and raised fears that he may mount an invasion of eastern Ukraine.

Economic sanctions, visa revocations and other steps designed to punish Russia for its actions also have done little to dissuade Mr. Putin.

This week, the White House sent a not-so-subtle signal to Moscow by announcing that the G-7 would move ahead and meet without Russia.

"President Obama invited his counterparts from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the EU to a meeting of G-7 leaders next week. The meeting will focus on the situation in Ukraine and further steps that the G-7 may take to respond to developments and to support Ukraine," said Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the White House's National Security Council.

Given Mr. Putin's latest comments and Russia's increasing military aggression, it's apparent that Russia and its fellow G-8 members simply are too different to function effectively together, some analysts say.

Although the fall of the Soviet Union offered Russia a new path forward, Mr. Putin instead appears to be clinging to the past. He repeatedly has called the demise of the Soviet empire "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

He further separated Moscow from the West on Tuesday during a passionate speech to the Russian parliament in which he claimed Crimea as an "integral part" of Russia.

As for relations with the West, Mr. Putin showed little desire to mend fences.

"They cheated us again and again, made decisions behind our back, presenting us with completed facts," he said. "That's the way it was with the expansion of NATO in the East, with the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They always told us the same thing: 'Well, this doesn't involve you.'"

Comments like those — and, more important, Russia's actions in Crimea — mean Moscow is to blame for its sudden de facto removal from the G-8, said Ariel Cohen, a senior research fellow in Russian and Eurasian studies at the Heritage Foundation.

"This is Russia's handiwork. Without the occupation of Crimea and without mobilization of its forces and threats against Ukraine, this would never have happened," Mr. Cohen said. "Beyond that, the G-8 is a Western alliance of democracies. Russia's political system is different today than the Western political systems, and Russia is also anti-Western today, as was evidenced by Mr. Putin's latest speech."

Russia And The Group Of 8

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

Expelling Russia from the Group of 8 — as demanded by hawks on the Hill and mooted in conflicting signals from Europe — is the wrong way to punish President Vladimir Putin for annexing Crimea from Ukraine.

Certainly when the French foreign minister says Russia has been suspended from the G-8, and the German chancellor says it has not been, and the British prime minister says it should be if it takes further steps against Ukraine, they demonstrate the disunity and lack of coordination Mr. Putin hoped to see.

But the question is whether expelling Mr. Putin from the G-8 at this stage is a productive way to either penalize Mr. Putin or change his conduct. The Group of 8 leading industrialized countries is not an institution and not even a bureaucracy. It is a forum for leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States

to come together once a year to discuss matters of global importance.

The G-8 may not be as relevant as it once was — the more inclusive G-20 may be the more important grouping — but within the eight, Mr. Putin comes face to face with the leaders of top democracies; expelled by them, he would retreat into his trademark claim that the West has always held Russia in disdain.

Maintaining an engagement with the Soviet Union during the Cold War was the logic behind keeping Moscow in the United Nations Security Council and other international institutions. When Communist rule collapsed, including Russia in what was then the G-7 was seen as a way to foster Russia's turn to democracy and market economy.

Certainly the leaders of the G-8, who are scheduled to meet without Russia next week, should consider how to make clear that they deem the manner of Russia's seizure of Crimea utterly unacceptable.

Their response should, of course, include a firm decision not to attend the G-8 meeting in Sochi, Russia, that Mr. Putin is supposed to host in June as the holder of this year's rotating chairmanship of the group.

Beyond that, the United States, its European and other allies must also continue searching for effective economic ways to punish Mr. Putin and his inner circle, and for ways to deter him from further aggression against Ukraine. These deliberations, as Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain has said, should include the possibility of expelling Russia from the G-8 altogether should it further violate Ukrainian sovereignty and thus close the door to any fruitful dialogue.

But continuing to engage Russia in international forums must be regarded as the preferable route as long as it is possible. And, in any case, there is nothing to gain in the sort of partisan saber-rattling that the House majority leader, Representative Eric Cantor, indulged in, or in the confused signals from Europe.

An international crisis is a time for America's leaders to come together, and not to try to score political points — and certainly not to descend into the sort of partisan squabbling in the House and Senate that has blocked a bill to provide loan guarantees to Ukraine.

It is a time for the West to demonstrate common purpose and discipline. Let's hope that the G-8-minus-1 meeting scheduled for next week can do a better job of projecting a unified front against Mr. Putin's arrogance and contempt for international law.

Congress Full Of Ideas For Handling Russia, But Little Agreement

By Lisa Mascaró

[McClatchy](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers are hammering President Barack Obama for a stronger U.S. response to the crisis in Ukraine, but Congress has so far been unable to provide a unified course of action amid its own partisan divisions in an election year.

Various proposals are being floated in Congress to shore up the new Ukrainian government and punish Russia for its move toward annexation of Crimea.

Republicans want to expand U.S. natural gas exports to Europe to reduce Western allies' reliance on the flow of fuel from Russia.

Democrats want to bolster the loan-making authority of the International Monetary Fund and are pushing for tougher enforcement actions against Russia in the World Trade Organization for previous rule violations.

"I've asked the House committees to examine additional steps that can be taken to impose greater costs on Russia," Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., said Tuesday.

But the proposals may do more to bolster lawmakers' standing at home than influence actions abroad.

Loosening federal licensing regulations for liquefied natural gas facilities, for example, is popular with industry groups, but it would take years before supplies could flow to allies, experts said.

Even a bipartisan measure Congress is considering to slap sanctions on Russian officials and provide \$1 billion in loan guarantees to Ukraine has hit political roadblocks.

The Senate is expected to pass the measure when Congress returns to session next week, despite objections from some Republicans over the Democratic-backed IMF provisions.

But the legislation will likely run into resistance in the House, where Republicans object to paying for the aid with funds from dormant Pentagon accounts.

Faced with a stalemate, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who led a bipartisan group of senators to Ukraine last week with Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., released a to-do list Tuesday of potential steps Congress and the administration can take to stem the crisis.

Among them: Send Ukraine food, fuel, spare parts, humanitarian aid and "modest" military assistance, in the form of small arms and ammunition. He said the aid should focus particularly on troops and civilians in the eastern part of the country, which could face further Russian incursions.

But such aid would still probably face a battle in Congress over how to pay for it.

Making Putin Pay

By Marco Rubio

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea is a direct challenge and long-term threat to the post-World War II international order for which the United States and our allies

have made great sacrifices over the past seven decades. If Putin is allowed to take land from a neighboring nation through deceit and raw military force without serious consequences, the precedent could have global repercussions, including in Asia.

Some have suggested that Crimea is not worth triggering tensions with Russia, given other interests that are more important. While it is best to avoid conflict whenever possible, history shows that illegitimate aggressions that go unchallenged are a virtual guarantee of even more dangerous conflict in the future.

Fortunately, Putin's illegitimate actions have united the United States and its allies in the free world in opposition. But while the steps taken so far by President Obama and the United States' European allies are welcome, they clearly will not be enough in the face of a determined Russian effort to forcibly redraw Europe's borders. Putin's annexation of Crimea must be met with immediate and meaningful consequences for his regime and those who benefit from it.

First, U.S. financial leverage toward Russia should be used to greater effect. U.S. visa and financial sanctions on Russian officials should be broadened to include Putin and his network of political and business allies. We should work with our partners in Europe to launch an asset-recovery program to identify the spoils of the Russian regime's corruption, which often are hidden abroad.

Second, we need to diplomatically isolate Russia. Instead of just canceling one summit meeting or technical talks, Russia should be removed immediately from every international forum not essential to resolving this crisis, including the Group of Eight. The NATO-Russia Council should be dissolved. Russian cooperation on global strategic challenges should not be sought until the people of Crimea are given a free and fair opportunity to decide their fate without outside pressure.

Put simply, Russia should no longer be considered a responsible partner on any major international issue. The Russian people should see that Putin's actions will bring about a decline of Russia's status as a global power, not a return to supposed Soviet glory.

To this end, Obama should urge U.S. allies to impose an arms embargo on Russia. It is unconscionable that NATO allies would send arms to Moscow even as it violates Ukrainian sovereignty.

Third, I welcome the fact that Vice President Biden is in the region this week to bring a message of reassurance to our allies and partners. I hope those assurances include a specific and clear response to requests by Georgia and Ukraine for lethal military support from the United States. It is shameful that even as Russia attempts to carve up Ukrainian territory, Ukraine's request for weapons, intelligence sharing and other assistance has been turned down by the Obama administration. We also need to deploy additional military

assets and even U.S. personnel to our allies, including Poland and the Baltic states.

Fourth, the Russian invasion of Crimea should dispel the myth that closing NATO's door to future allies would appease Russian aggression. We must make clear to all interested partners in Europe who wish to join NATO and meet the requirements that the alliance remains open for membership. The president should personally engage his counterparts in advance of the September NATO summit in Wales to ensure that the freeze on expansion is broken.

The president has sufficient tools at his disposal to do most of these things. But his hand would be strengthened if a united Congress gave him the necessary authority to follow through. That is why it was so ill-advised for the administration to push to include a series of controversial and unrelated International Monetary Fund reforms in a bill authorizing economic assistance for Ukraine and imposing sanctions. Instead of sending a clear signal that Congress is united behind the people of Ukraine and sanctions against Putin, it threatens to create unnecessary dissent over these unrelated measures.

I hope that events this week and Russia's unrelenting aggression will lead Congress to move quickly next week to pass an assistance package to Ukraine and tough sanctions on Russia. Although I remain concerned by the proposed IMF reforms included in the legislation, the need to send a strong bipartisan message of solidarity to the people of Ukraine and a statement of resolve to Moscow far outweighs any misgivings I and others might have.

Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida, is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

US Lawmakers Urge Hagel To End Pentagon Contracts With Russian Firm

By Warren Strobel

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Shell Pulls Out Of Ukraine Deal Near Crimea

Company Withdraws From Talks on Skifka Field But Is Still Pursuing Other Ukraine Projects

By Justin Scheck

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Obama Doesn't Grasp Putin's Eurasian Ambitions

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

IT'S EASY to conclude that Vladimir Putin's passionate defense of Russia's takeover of Crimea "just didn't jibe with reality," as Secretary of State John F. Kerry put it. In a speech on Tuesday, the Russian ruler repeated mendacious charges that the Ukrainian government had been hijacked by "nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites"; voiced his paranoid conspiracy theory about supposed Western sponsorship of popular revolutions, including the Arab Spring; and brazenly compared Russia's abrupt annexation of Ukraine with the reunification of Germany.

It's necessary, however, to take some of what Mr. Putin said seriously, because of the implicit threat it poses to European and global security. Mr. Putin advanced a radical and dangerous argument: that the collapse of the Soviet Union left "the Russian nation" as "one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders." That, he suggested, gave Moscow the right to intervene in Crimea, and by extension anywhere else where it considers that ethnic Russians or their culture are threatened.

Mr. Putin's doctrine would justify Russian meddling not just in other parts of Ukraine — he claimed that "large sections of the historical south of Russia" now "form the southeast of Ukraine" — but also in other former Soviet republics with substantial populations of ethnic Russians.

Western officials seem to be betting that Mr. Putin won't dare to extend his aggression beyond Crimea. But then, just last week they were saying they did not expect Moscow to move quickly on Crimean annexation. The Obama administration and its European allies have been too slow to grasp that Mr. Putin is bent on upending the post-Cold War order in Europe and reversing Russia's loss of dominion over Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Worse, some in and outside of Western governments may be feeding Mr. Putin's imperialism by rushing to concede "Russian interests" in Eurasia. President Obama and Mr. Kerry are among those who have said they recognize such "interests" in Ukraine. But the fact that there are ethnic Russians in a country should not give Mr. Putin's regime a privileged say in its affairs. The idea that areas populated by Russians must be ruled or protected by Moscow is less the ideology of the 19th century, as Mr. Kerry would have it, than of the 1930s.

Mr. Putin's claim that Russia should have a say in the political orientation of its neighbors, and whether they join alliances such as the European Union or NATO, is equally unacceptable. (Mr. Kerry recently renounced, gratuitously, any such U.S. claim on Latin American states, several of which have close military ties with Russia.) Perversely, some in the West are echoing Mr. Putin's argument that his aggression is an understandable response to Western encouragement of the former Soviet Bloc states that embraced democracy and free markets and sought NATO and European Union membership.

The two countries that Mr. Putin has invaded since 2008, Ukraine and Georgia, were rejected for NATO membership action plans that year. Can it seriously be argued that Estonia and Latvia, with their large Russian minorities, now would be less vulnerable to Russian aggression had they had not joined NATO? The crisis in Europe has come about not because Western institutions expanded, but because they did not fulfill their post-Cold War promise of "a Europe whole and free."

American Fatigue Syndrome

If the U.S. doesn't lead, the strongmen win. For them it's easier.

By Daniel Henninger

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Can Putin's Power Grab In Crimea Bring Us Together?

By E.J. Dionne

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

Vladimir Putin's grab of Crimea has exposed the paradoxes in U.S. attitudes toward foreign policy.

Congress has been unusually united in condemning the Russian leader's aggression and calling for his isolation. His belligerent offensive has been denounced by such liberals as Sens. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and by many conservatives, including Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Ron Johnson (R-Wis).

On the other hand, a Pew Research Center poll found that by a margin of 56 percent to 29 percent, Americans said it was more important that the United States "not get too involved" in the Ukrainian situation than to "take a firm stand against Russian actions."

Support for minimizing involvement spanned party lines: 50 percent of Republicans took this view, as did 55 percent of Democrats and 62 percent of independents. The survey was conducted March 6-9, before Russia annexed Crimea, but it nonetheless underscores the nation's allergy to foreign entanglement, even as Americans also clearly and deeply mistrust Putin.

Annexing territory by force is as unacceptable to advocates of multilateralism as it is to those who believe in go-it-alone assertiveness. The Russian leader's open mourning over the collapse of the Soviet Union horrifies liberals, who saw the end of the Cold War as an opportunity for a freer, less bellicose world, as well as conservatives, who always said Putin's KGB past was the truest indicator of his worldview and intentions.

But the nearly universal antipathy to Putinism cannot hide our divisions, and they are especially pronounced in the Republican Party. Most of the GOP's prominent voices

preach a hard line against Putin, but a broad anti-interventionist constituency within the conservative movement continues to grow.

Former representative Ron Paul spoke for this tendency in a blunt USA Today op-ed this week. "Why," Paul asked, "does the U.S. care which flag will be hoisted on a small piece of land thousands of miles away?"

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) shares his father's libertarianism, but his efforts to navigate among competing Republican foreign policy factions during the Ukrainian crisis have led the younger Paul in several directions at once.

Sen. Paul sounded like his dad on Feb. 25 when he told The Post's Robert Costa: "The Ukraine has a long history of either being part of the Soviet Union or within that sphere." He chastised "some on our side . . . stuck in the Cold War era" who "want to tweak Russia all the time." In a March 10 piece for the Breitbart Web site, he mocked "politicians who have never seen war talking tough for the sake of their political careers."

But in a March 9 Time magazine essay, Sen. Paul himself took a tougher line. "It is America's duty to condemn these actions in no uncertain terms," he said, and to be "the strongest nation in opposing Russia's latest aggression."

Rand Paul's delicate dance is a reminder that when President Obama decided to go to Congress last fall to win approval for airstrikes against Syria for its use of chemical weapons, he faced resistance from doves in his own party and from anti-interventionist Republicans. Obama has faced criticism for inconstancy in abandoning military action in favor of a partnership with Russia to remove the Syrian regime's chemical arsenal. But it's important to remember that many in the GOP were skeptical of using force from the start.

Those who hope the United States and its allies will take what Durbin on Wednesday called "a good, hard, tough stand" against Putin thus need to consider not only European worries about the impact of sanctions on Western economies but also the sustained backlash against Iraq and Afghanistan. Some who supported those wars now see a chance to challenge "the idol of war-weariness," as neoconservative commentator William Kristol put it in arguing that a "war-weary public can be awakened and rallied."

But Kristol's proposition faces hostility within, as well as outside, his own party. Americans, particularly those bearing the greatest ongoing costs from the economic downturn, will not have much of a taste for activism in foreign policy until their burdens are eased.

We must confront Putin, but this will require a foreign policy consensus that has vanished. A new one will have to be based on principles that predate the Iraq engagement and involve a more measured use of U.S. power.

Thus the final paradox: Putin has given Obama the opportunity to begin rebuilding this consensus — if the

president decides to try, and if his critics are willing to help him do it.

How To Punish Putin

By Alexey A. Navalny

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

MOSCOW — AS I write this, I am under house arrest. I was detained at a rally in support of anti-Putin protesters who were jailed last month.

In September, I ran for mayor of Moscow as a pro-reform, pro-democracy opposition candidate and received almost a third of the vote despite having no access to state media. Today, my blog, which was until recently visited by over two million readers per month, has been blocked as "extremist" after I called for friendly ties with Ukraine and compliance with international law.

For years, I have been telling journalists that President Vladimir V. Putin's approval rating would soon peak and then tumble. Russia's economy is stagnant, I said, and the Russian people would soon weary of the president's empty promises. Even a rally-round-the-flag military adventure — a "little war," as it's known in Russia — would be impossible, I believed. Russia no longer had enemies.

Then, on Feb. 28, Russia sent troops to Ukraine in precisely such a "little war." I admit that I underestimated Mr. Putin's talent for finding enemies, as well as his dedication to ruling as "president for life," with powers on par with the czars'.

As a citizen and patriot, I cannot support actions against Russia that would worsen conditions for our people. Still, I recommend two options that, if successfully implemented, I believe would be welcomed by most Russians.

First, although Mr. Putin's invasion has already prompted the European Union to impose sanctions on 21 officials, and the United States on seven, most of these government figures cannot be considered influential. They do not have major assets outside Russia and are irrelevant to Mr. Putin; sanctioning them will not change Russia's policy. After all the tough talk from Western politicians, this action is mocked in Russia and even seen as a tacit encouragement to Mr. Putin and his entourage, who seem to possess some magical immunity.

Instead, Western nations could deliver a serious blow to the luxurious lifestyles enjoyed by the Kremlin's cronies who shuttle between Russia and the West. This means freezing the oligarchs' financial assets and seizing their property.

Such sanctions should primarily target Mr. Putin's inner circle, the Kremlin mafia who pillage the nation's wealth, including Gennady N. Timchenko, head of the Volga Group; Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, influential businessmen and former judo sparring partners of Mr. Putin; Yuri V. Kovalchuk, a financier believed to be Mr. Putin's banker; Vladimir I. Yakunin, president of Russian Railways; the oligarchs Roman

A. Abramovich and Alisher B. Usmanov; and Igor I. Sechin and Aleksei B. Miller, the heads of Rosneft and Gazprom, respectively.

The sanctions must also hit the oligarchs whose media outlets parrot the regime lines, and target Mr. Putin's entire "war cabinet": the TV spin doctors, compliant Duma members and apparatchiks of Mr. Putin's United Russia Party.

The invasion of Ukraine has polarized members of Russia's elite, many of whom view it as reckless. Real sanctions, such as blocking access to their plush London apartments, will show that Mr. Putin's folly comes with serious costs.

Second, Western authorities must investigate ill-gotten gains from Russia within their jurisdictions. The Anti-Corruption Foundation, which I established in 2011, has revealed dozens of major cases of graft. In 90 percent of those cases, Russian money was laundered in the West. Sadly, American, European Union and British law enforcement agencies have stymied our efforts to investigate such criminal plunder.

"Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia in the hearts and minds of people," Mr. Putin claimed this week. But even among the most nationalist and pro-Soviet of our people, a longing to restore Crimea to Russian rule faded years ago.

Yet Mr. Putin has cynically raised nationalist fervor to a fever pitch; imperialist annexation is a strategic choice to bolster his regime's survival. Mobilizing the masses by distracting them from real problems like corruption and economic stagnation can take place only beneath the banner of fighting external enemies.

What is truly alarming in Mr. Putin's rash behavior is that he is motivated by the desire for revenge against the Ukrainian people for revolting against a Kremlin-friendly government. A rational actor would know that the precedent of holding a local referendum to determine sovereignty is risky for Russia — a federation of more than 80 disparate regions, including more than 160 ethnic groups and at least 100 languages.

It is true that the consensus in both Russia and Crimea is that the peninsula has historically been closer to Moscow than to Kiev. But the notion that this reunification should be achieved at the end of the barrel of a gun is supported only by Mr. Putin's hard-core base. The opposition has spoken clearly. The antiwar protest held in Moscow over the weekend was the largest in two years, and it exceeded any counterdemonstration mustered by pro-Kremlin movements.

There is a common delusion among the international community that although Mr. Putin is corrupt, his leadership is necessary because his regime subdues the dark, nationalist forces that otherwise would seize power in Russia. The West should admit that it, too, has underestimated Mr. Putin's

malign intent. It is time to end the dangerous delusion that enables him.

Alexey A. Navalny is a Russian lawyer, anti-corruption activist and opposition politician.

Ukraine Orders Its Military Out Of Crimea Held By Russia

By Daryna Krasnolutska, Daria Marchak

[Bloomberg News](#), March 20, 2014

Ukraine said it would pull its military out of Crimea and fortify its eastern border with Russia as European leaders struggled to come up with a unified response to punish Vladimir Putin for annexing the breakaway Black Sea region.

Demilitarization "is the best way to de-escalate the situation," Andriy Parubiy, head of Ukraine's National Security Council, told reporters in Kiev, while declining to say when the evacuation would take place. "Troops from both Ukraine and Russia" should be removed from Crimea, he said.

The withdrawal announcement comes as pro-Russian civilians in Crimea continued to detain Ukrainian military personnel, including its navy chief, after overrunning installations in the region, that's home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine's acting President Oleksandr Turchynov set a deadline of 9 p.m. local time for their release.

The governor of the eastern Kharkiv region warned yesterday that Russia had increased its military presence near the border. Russian forces have been boosted in the last five days, massing along roadways about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the frontier, said Ihor Baluta, appointed by the interim government in Kiev after President Viktor Yanukovych fled for Russia.

During a Kremlin speech to Russian lawmakers yesterday that was met with cheers and standing ovations, Putin blamed Western encroachment for forcing him to take control of Crimea, a move he described as reversing a historic wrong.

A Snapshot of Ukraine's Past and Future

While he said Russia doesn't plan to further split up Ukraine, Putin asserted his right to defend Russian speakers in Ukraine's east, where the nation's prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, says the Kremlin is behind "aggressive" protests.

European Union leaders meeting tomorrow will seek to overcome differences on how to pressure Putin into a retreat after Russian officials shrugged off an earlier round of visa bans and asset freezes by the EU and U.S.

The summit probably won't agree on economic sanctions, Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka said today, the CTK news service reported. Penalties against Russia should be gradual and reversible to as to avoid a return to the "Iron Curtain," Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi told lawmakers.

Underscoring the cautious mood, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said today that the West must try to avoid a “spiral” of sanctions with Russia, according to the Die Welt newspaper.

“It’s important to try everything to achieve a de-escalation and not to think in categories of retaliation,” Steinmeier told an economic conference sponsored by the daily.

It’s unclear whether EU leaders will agree on a road map for economic sanctions at the two-day summit, five EU officials told reporters today. A less controversial option would be to expand an existing blacklist of 21 Russian and Crimean officials, they said.

Ukraine Drawing Up Plans To Evacuate Forces From Crimea In Face Of Russian Takeover

By Carol Morello, Kathy Lally

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

SEVASTOPOL, Crimea — Russian-backed forces began what appeared to be a steady occupation of Ukrainian military facilities in the breakaway Crimean Peninsula on Wednesday, and Ukraine’s security chief said his government was drawing up plans to evacuate its troops from Crimea.

Andriy Parubiy, secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council, also announced that Ukraine would hold joint military exercises with the United States and Britain. He did not immediately provide details. He said the government in Kiev would seek United Nations support for turning the Crimean Peninsula into a demilitarized zone, news agencies reported.

Parubiy’s announcement of planning to withdraw Ukrainian troops from Crimea appeared to contradict an earlier statement from acting Defense Minister Ihor Tenyukh that the country’s forces would not withdraw from Crimea despite Russia’s takeover of the region, formalized in a treaty signed Tuesday by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Despite Tenyukh’s vow, Ukrainian service members have been abandoning military facilities in Crimea in the face of demands from Russian troops and pro-Moscow militiamen.

Those forces on Wednesday took over Ukraine’s naval headquarters in Crimea and two other facilities and detained Ukraine’s navy commander, according to Defense Ministry and other reports.

The storming of the naval base in Sevastopol and the other facilities, and the positioning of forces outside a fourth base, was a tense reminder of how unresolved the situation on the ground remains in Crimea even as Russia declares its absorption of the region an established fact. Ukrainian troops largely gave way without resistance, though tension may be building as they face an apparent choice of becoming Russian soldiers and sailors, or moving from Crimea and maintaining their allegiance to Kiev.

Ukrainian military spokesman Vladislav Seleznyov said the commander and some other officers and staff were hurt during a scuffle at a military meteorological unit near the town of Yevpatoria, but those were the only reported injuries. He would not specify how many military installations in Crimea remain under Ukrainian control.

At the naval headquarters in Sevastopol, about 200 attackers rammed through the gate of the office complex in a truck and raised the tricolor Russian flag. It was difficult to identify the attackers, but they were well-organized and carried out the takeover without incident. After it was over, men wearing unmarked uniforms and holding automatic weapons were guarding the gate.

The commander of the Ukrainian navy, Adm. Serhiy Haiduk, was detained for questioning, according to the local prosecutor’s office. In another sign of shifting control, Tenyukh, the Ukrainian defense minister, was refused entry to Crimea when he tried to visit the region Wednesday.

Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov on Wednesday evening gave Crimean authorities three hours — until 3 p.m. Eastern time — to release Haiduk and stop harassing the Ukrainian military.

If the admiral is not released, he said in a statement on his Web site, Ukraine will take “appropriate measures.”

In Moscow, Russian authorities began issuing passports to residents of Crimea on Wednesday, said Konstantin Romodanovsky, head of the Federal Migration Service in Russia. He said Crimeans had become Russian citizens Tuesday.

The Russian government newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta, meanwhile, began publishing in Crimea with an initial print run of 5,000 copies.

For its part, the Ukrainian government in Kiev approved a plan on procedures to evacuate Crimeans who want to move to the mainland.

Ukraine, unwilling to fire shots that would provoke an even greater show of Russian force, has been left scrambling for a response. The Ukrainian military, with about 130,000 troops, few of them considered combat-ready, is far smaller than Russia’s 845,000-member armed forces.

Military analysts say Ukraine has enough tanks to inflict some damage but not to overpower Russia. Last week, Ukrainian officials issued a call for volunteers to join a national guard, an attempt to harness the fighting spirit that emerged among demonstrators in Kiev who forced the ouster of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich last month.

But that national guard force — expected to number about 40,000 eventually — would operate under the Interior Ministry, helping to keep order and protect power plants and other important facilities.

In Kiev on Wednesday, Ukrainians were discussing ways to get more help from Kiev’s friends in the West. There was little bravado about taking on Russia by themselves.

"It's not just Ukraine's drama," said Yuriy Shcherbak, a former Ukrainian ambassador to the United States. "It's a world drama."

Vasyl Filipchuk, a former Ukrainian diplomat who is now a political analyst, said the United Nations should suspend Russia from membership in the Security Council to demonstrate that the world is serious about punishing it for annexing Crimea.

"Russia thinks Ukraine is weak," Filipchuk said. "Russia thinks the world is weak and frightened."

Neither Europe nor the United States has produced the kind of sanctions that would give Russia serious pause about widening its incursion into Ukraine, he said. The U.S. sanctions, he said, would do little more than keep a few of Putin's friends from going to Miami Beach.

Ukraine hopes to sign a partnership agreement Friday with the European Union — the very agreement that Yanukovich refused to sign, setting off the protests that eventually toppled him.

"We need to work with our partners to develop sanctions," said Olesksandr Sushko, a director of the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation in Kiev, suggesting that Russian property abroad could be made subject to seizure.

Shcherbak said Ukraine finds itself at a vulnerable moment, with the old government destroyed and a new one still getting its bearings. It needs help to maintain its security, which is just as important to Ukraine as it is to the West. Kiev, he said, should appeal to the United States and the West for military training and equipment.

"It would be a very dark period for us if we stand up against the Russian military without support," he said.

Despite the insistence of top Ukrainian officials that the military would stand its ground in Crimea, troops at the Sevastopol naval office were seen leaving in civilian clothes, checked out at the gate by the forces in control of the now-Russian-flagged building. Igor Yeskin, who identified himself as a member of the local self-defense militia that organized the raid, pledged that raids on other facilities would continue because "today the Ukrainian military is on the territory of the Russian Federation."

A base near Novozernoye also was stormed Wednesday, but the attack was halted, Ukrainian officials said. Russian authorities were at the base negotiating its handover, said Seleznyov.

Vice President Biden warned that Russia had taken a "dark path" that would leave it isolated. Nevertheless, Russian officials hurried to complete the formalities of the Crimean annexation. The chairman of Russia's Constitutional Court told reporters in St. Petersburg on Wednesday that, as the morning's first order of business, the court had ruled the acquisition of Crimea constitutional.

Sergei Naryshkin, speaker of the State Duma, the lower house of Russia's parliament, said in Moscow that legislation

ratifying the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol could be submitted Wednesday and perhaps given a final vote Thursday.

"I would like to assure everyone that State Duma deputies will adopt these two historical legal acts within the shortest period of time," Naryshkin said. "And we will do everything to support the Crimean people in these hard times, especially in the transitional period."

He described the annexation in grand terms, calling it a new stage in world history and making an oblique reference to Russia's staring down malevolent forces unleashed by the West. "This is a turning point in the confrontation between good and evil," he said.

The turnover of control at military facilities on Wednesday came in addition to the takeovers of bases by Russian or Russian-backed forces in recent weeks, including the airstrip at Ukraine's Belbek air base.

A communications specialist in the Ukrainian navy who was outside the naval base when the assault began said a truck rammed the gate and about 200 men with AK-47 rifles stormed the facility, a collection of office buildings in the center of Sevastopol. The man, who would give his name only as Sergei, said the attackers appeared to be "Crimean self-defense." But he said that from their accents he surmised they were Russian.

The Ukrainians inside initially tried to barricade themselves but could not hold out, he said.

The commander of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, Vice Adm. Alexander Vitko, arrived at the base after the incursion to negotiate with Haiduk, the Ukrainian commander, Russia's Interfax news agency reported.

In Kiev, Tenyukh said Ukraine had no intention of withdrawing its military from Crimea. Ukrainian officials said Tuesday that Sunday's referendum in Crimea, in which voters chose to join Russia, was illegal. Ukraine, they said, would never recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea.

But on Wednesday morning, the forces that stormed the Sevastopol base took down the Ukrainian flag and raised Russian standards. And on Tuesday in Sevastopol, the most Russian city in Crimea, thousands danced and sang as a treaty was signed making Crimea part of Russia.

But in a Muslim cemetery on Tuesday outside Simferopol, Crimea's capital, hundreds attended the funeral of a Tatar last seen being taken away by men in military jackets after a protest.

The gleeful celebration by Crimea's ethnic Russian majority, whose members think a historic wrong is being righted, and the grim ritual of mourning by members of a minority who are anxious about what comes next, neatly summed up reactions to the new pact annexing Crimea to the Russian Federation.

Many details must be ironed out before the annexation becomes official, but the transformation appears likely to

happen quickly. Ukrainian citizens in Crimea are being given a month to decide whether they want to become citizens of Russia or stay with Ukraine.

Ukraine Readies Plan To Evacuate Troops From Crimea

Official in Kiev Says Military Personnel and Their Families Would Move to Mainland Ukraine

By Philip Shishkin, James Marson
[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Ukraine Bows To Crimea Seizure, Plans For Pullout

By John-Thor Dahlburg, Peter Leonard
[Associated Press](#), March 20, 2014

SEVASTOPOL, Crimea (AP) — Surrendering to Russia's inexorable seizure of Crimea, Ukraine announced plans Wednesday for mass troop withdrawals from the strategic peninsula as Moscow-loyal forces seized control of Kiev's naval headquarters here and detained its commander.

Attempting to face down the unblinking incursion, Ukraine said it would hold joint military exercises with the United States and Britain.

Hours after masked Russian-speaking troops forced their way onto Ukraine's main naval base here, forlorn Ukrainian soldiers streamed out carrying clothing and other belongings in bags. A group of local militia and Cossacks, later joined by officers from Russia's Black Sea Fleet, looked on.

Just how many retreating troops Ukraine will have to absorb was unclear as many servicemen in Crimea have already switched sides to Russia, but authorities say it was prepared to relocate as many as 25,000 soldiers and their families.

Humbled but defiant, Ukraine lashed out symbolically at Russia by declaring its intent to leave the Moscow-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose alliance of 11 former Soviet nations. The last nation to leave the group was Georgia, which lost a brief war with neighboring Russia in 2008 and ended up losing two separatist territories.

Vice President Joe Biden, in Lithuania trying to reassure nations bordering Russia alarmed by the sight of an expansion-minded neighbor, said the U.S. would stand by them.

"We're in this with you, together," Biden said.

Ukraine has been powerless to prevent Russian troops from taking control of Crimea, which President Vladimir Putin formally annexed Tuesday with the stroke of a pen. Crimea's absorption came after a hastily organized referendum in which the population overwhelmingly, albeit under conditions

akin to martial law, voted in favor of seceding from Ukraine and joining Russia.

Russia's Constitutional Court chairman, Valery Zorkin, said Wednesday the treaty signed by Putin has been ruled valid, meaning it now only requires ratification by the Russian parliament.

On Wednesday morning, militiamen under apparent Russian command barged their way into Ukraine's naval headquarters in Sevastopol, detaining the head of Ukraine's navy and seizing the facility. The incursion, which Ukraine's Defense Ministry described as being led by a self-described local defense force, Cossacks and "aggressive women," proceeded with no resistance.

Upon gaining entrance to the base, the storming party raised a Russian flag on the headquarters square.

The unarmed militiamen waited for an hour on the square and, following the arrival of the commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, they took over the building.

By afternoon, they were in full control of the naval headquarters, a set of three-story white concrete buildings with blue trim.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry said Rear Adm. Sergei Haiduk was detained and a news agency close to the Russian-backed local authorities reported that he had been summoned for questioning by prosecutors.

Later in the day, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu ordered the Crimean authorities to release Haiduk.

Andriy Parubiy, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, said the government was drawing up plans to evacuate its outnumbered troops from Crimea back to the mainland and will seek U.N. support to turn the peninsula into a demilitarized zone.

"We are working out a plan of action so that we can transfer not just servicemen, but first of all members of their family who are in Crimea, quickly and effectively to mainland Ukraine," Parubiy said.

Parubiy also announced Ukraine would hold military maneuvers with the United States and Britain, signatories, along with Russia, of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. He provided no details.

The document was designed to guarantee Ukraine's territorial integrity when it surrendered its share of Soviet nuclear arsenals to Russia after the Soviet Union broke up in 1991. Ukraine has accused Russia of breaching the agreement by taking over the Crimean Peninsula.

In Washington, the Pentagon said it would participate as planned in a multinational military exercise this summer in Ukraine. Dubbed "Rapid Trident," the ground maneuvers have been held annually for a number of years with forces from Britain and other NATO countries as well as Ukraine, which has a partner relationship with NATO but is not a member.

The Pentagon gave no details on the number of U.S. forces expected to participate or when the exercises would be held. Last year, the two-week maneuvers involving 17 nations were held in July.

Meanwhile, in a warning to Moscow, Biden declared that the United States will respond to any aggression against its NATO allies, including neighbors to Russia.

Standing with two Baltic leaders in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, Biden said the U.S. was “absolutely committed” to defending its allies, adding that President Barack Obama plans to seek concrete commitments from NATO members to ensure the alliance can safeguard its collective security.

“Russia cannot escape the fact that the world is changing and rejecting outright their behavior,” Biden said after meeting with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė and Latvian President Andris Bērziņš.

Beyond the grander political gestures of the day, Parubiy said Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry had been instructed to introduce a visa regime for travel between the two nations. The move could badly affect Ukrainian migrant laborers, many of whom work in Russia and send home money. It came against the backdrop of claims that Russian citizens were pouring across the Ukrainian border to foment secessionist unrest in bordering eastern regions.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was headed to the region to try to resolve the crisis. He was to meet with Russian leaders in Moscow on Thursday, followed by talks Friday with Ukraine’s new government on Friday.

Ban has repeatedly called for a solution guided by the principles of the U.N. Charter including sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine.

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Ukraine Orders Its Troops To Leave Crimea, Russia Offers Better Pay For Them To Change Sides

By Matthew Schofield

[McClatchy](#), March 20, 2014

KIEV, Ukraine — A pair of Russian generals have been visiting Ukrainian military bases in Crimea and offering soldiers there fat pay and pension packages if they join the Russian army before a Friday deadline, when Russia has said its patience with a Ukrainian presence in the Black Sea peninsula will run out.

A Ukrainian captain who was among the officers who met with them at a base in Perevalne, Crimea, said in a phone interview that at each base the generals make a very simple point: The Russian military would love to welcome Ukrainian troops into its ranks.

The possibility is lost on no one, the captain said, that the alternative is a grim one: Russia has said that on Friday Ukrainian soldiers will be classified as bandits and terrorists and hunted by the vastly superior Russian military now on the peninsula. On Tuesday a Ukrainian soldier was killed and an officer injured when Russian troops and local paramilitaries stormed a base in Simferopol. On Wednesday, pro-Russian forces took control of the Ukrainian naval headquarters and raised the Russian flag. The Ukrainian commander was arrested and troops were left to wander off on their own.

The captain said he expects many of his compatriots to accept the Russian offer, especially those who consider Crimea home.

“The pay is five times that offered by Ukraine,” he said. “The pensions are five times better, and will be offered 20 years sooner. We are told we would serve on the same military base. Defend the same soil, the homeland of many at these bases. Families living quite nearby the bases will be able to remain in their same homes.”

The tale he tells matches Ukrainian news reports, though there is no government confirmation, from either Russia or Ukraine.

But the prospect of some, if not most, of Ukraine’s Crimea-based military going over to the Russian side on Friday might be one reason the government in Kiev on Wednesday ordered its troops to withdraw, effective immediately. It was a surprising order, given that only Tuesday the government had told the troops to stand firm. It was not immediately clear how the soldiers reacted to the new order, and the captain’s cellphone was not answered later Wednesday.

Word of the Russian effort to woo Ukraine’s soldiers in Crimea came one day after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed treaties with Crimean leaders to annex the peninsula, which makes up 4.5 percent of Ukrainian territory. On Wednesday, Russian courts ruled that the treaties, which would create two new Russian republics, Crimea and Sevastopol, were legal. The Russian Parliament is expected to give its stamp of approval by Friday.

With tens of thousands of Russian troops already in Crimea, the Russians have been in control of the region since the end of February. While Putin has maintained that no Russian troops were there beyond what was allowed under Russia’s rent agreement for its Black Sea Fleet base at Sevastopol, Ukrainian and Russian military officials have met many times and have been quite open about what was going on.

The arrival of the generals was the latest example of that, the captain said, and on a base where 60 percent of troops are native Crimean, and often of Russian heritage, their offer was viewed favorably by many.

“I cannot even bring myself to think of them as traitors for doing this,” he said, speaking on the condition that his

name not be disclosed for security reasons. He said he does not intend to take the Russian offer but understands why many, many others will.

"We have been given two options by the Russians, and no offers of help from Kiev," he said. "The choice is to stand with Ukraine, and commit suicide, or to join the Russian force and live a better life."

What that means: Come Friday he is the enemy of most of those he's served with, a service which includes time fighting in Iraq.

He said that many of the officers he's served with already had turned in or at least prepared letters to resign their commissions. The captain said he would not hide his disillusionment with the reaction from Kiev.

"But I know the Russians planned this well, they attacked when we were weakest," he said. "Our government is in no position to react to this crisis. The result is that the Russians have known what they intend every day of this past month, while Kiev still has not been able to come up with a counter-strategy."

How well thought out is the Russian plan: He said that for many, only personal honor had been holding them to their posts. The Russian offer takes that into account. They will not be asked to pledge allegiance to Russia if they think that would besmirch their honor, because to Russia, it is important their honor remain intact. Instead, they will pledge their loyalty to Crimea, their home.

The captain said the offers were set up to test any loyalty. For instance, 37-year-old officers were offered three-year contracts at \$1,000 a month (in Crimea, \$200 a month is a good wage) and told that at 40, they could receive \$1,000-a-month pensions (again, Ukrainian pensions are less than \$200 a month) and retire. In Ukraine, they could retire from the military at 40, but the pensions would start paying out at 60, he said.

"Few people look forward to forced suicide," he said. "Ukrainians feel abandoned."

In fact, he said that among those not considering the Russian offer and without instruction from Kiev, many, like him, are coming up with their own exit strategy.

On Wednesday morning, the captain left his base and went into Simferopol to find an ATM. This was possible because the blockade he's been living under since the last days of February has lightened this week. The "peace interval" that began Sunday after the referendum is scheduled to end Friday.

He said he was shocked by what he found in Simferopol.

"The air had changed," he said. What he described as Russian paramilitary thugs were randomly checking papers and stopping traffic in the city. "It felt lawless."

At the ATM, he said he withdrew as much money as he could imagine needing, for food, for transportation, for help.

His plan is to work until the base is handed to the Russians, then try to make his way north across the new border between what until now had been Ukraine and Ukraine. He hopes then to find new orders.

"I have friends who will meet me once I make it to the mainland," he said. "They will help me out. After that, I don't know what happens. But only a fool thinks this ends with Crimea."

Ukraine Plans To Pull Military From Crimea, Conceding Loss

By David M. Herszenhorn, Alan Cowell

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

SEVASTOPOL, Crimea — Bowing to the reality of the Russian military occupation of Crimea a day after Russia announced it was annexing the disputed peninsula, the Ukrainian government said on Wednesday that it had drawn up plans to evacuate all of its military personnel and their families and was prepared to relocate as many as 25,000 of them to mainland Ukraine.

Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and sailors have been trapped on military bases and other installations here for more than two weeks, surrounded by heavily armed Russian military forces and loosely organized local militia.

While the provisional government in Kiev has insisted that Russia's annexation of Crimea is illegal and has appealed to international supporters for help, the evacuation announcement by the head of the national security council, Andriy Parubiy, effectively amounted to a surrender of Crimea, at least from a military standpoint.

It came hours after militiamen, backed by Russian forces, seized the headquarters of the Ukrainian navy in Sevastopol and detained its commander.

Officers of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which is also headquartered here, later entered the base through its main gates as Ukrainian military personnel streamed out carrying clothing and other personal belongings.

The takeover proceeded as anger intensified in the West over Russia's move to annex Crimea, with calls for Russia's expulsion from important international bodies such as the G-8 grouping of leading economic powers. At the same time, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. continued his effort to reassure American allies in the Baltic region, once part of the Soviet Union, that the United States would protect them from any aggression by Russia.

The United Nations said Wednesday that Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general, would fly to Moscow and Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, on Thursday and Friday for meetings with leaders, including President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, whose moves to reclaim Crimea have set off the biggest crisis in East-West relations since the Soviet Union's demise two decades ago.

Mr. Ban has expressed disappointment over the Kremlin-backed weekend referendum in Crimea that created the basis for Russia's annexation, but he has said nothing about whether he considers the Russian step to be illegal. The United States and other Western members of the Security Council, which was meeting later Thursday, proposed a resolution last Saturday declaring the referendum illegal but Russia vetoed that measure.

At the Ukrainian naval headquarters here, soldiers with machine guns, wearing green camouflage but still no identifying insignia, were deployed in and around the base. A large military truck parked just outside the base bore the black-and-white license plates of the Russian forces.

Although the gates were forced open during the initial storming of the base, there were no reports of shooting or injuries. And while there was no indication that the Ukrainian government was prepared to issue a formal surrender in Crimea, capitulation by military units surrounded throughout the peninsula seemed increasingly inevitable.

When asked why they did not return fire, one Ukrainian soldier leaving the base here said, "We had no order and no weapons." Another said, "We met them empty-handed."

On Tuesday evening, after reports that a shooting at another military installation, not far from the Crimean capital of Simferopol, had left at least one Ukrainian soldier dead, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry in Kiev issued a statement saying its troops had been authorized to use force to defend themselves.

At the base here in Sevastopol, however, the troops seemed to feel less of a threat of deadly harm, than the resolute sense of facing eviction at gunpoint.

Andrew Yankov, a member of a local self-defense group who was present during the takeover, described the action as "a big victory."

"We stood here for weeks and now we're finally successful," Mr. Yankov said. "It's also freedom for the guys inside. We took responsibility. They're happy because they're tired. They want to go home."

At a far side of the base, local militia units appeared to be looting some equipment, removing a refrigerator through one gate, and throwing bags over the walls, which were then loaded onto a truck.

The base, like other military installations across Crimea, has been surrounded since shortly after Russian forces occupied the region at the beginning of March.

The local militiamen have been guarding the perimeter of the base along with professional soldiers who have no identifying badges but whose equipment and organization leave little doubt they are Russian military personnel. The militiamen entered the base around 8 a.m. and an hour or so later hoisted a Russian flag on the main flagpole.

The seizure came a day after Mr. Putin reclaimed Crimea as a part of Russia, reversing what he described as a

historical injustice made by the Soviet Union 60 years ago and brushing aside international condemnation that could leave Russia shunned internationally.

The United States and Western allies have begun imposing economic sanctions to punish Russia for the incursion into Crimea, but it is not clear that they are prepared for any action that would prevent the Russian annexation from moving forward.

On Wednesday, there were reports from several bases that Russian forces and local militias were gathering in anticipation of seizing control, in Novoozornoe, on a lake not far from the city of Yevpatoria on the western coast of Crimea.

Russia's annexation of Crimea drew broad Western protest on Tuesday as governments scrambled to find a response to the Kremlin's audacious moves, which have unfolded with remarkable haste since the stealthy takeover of the strategic peninsula began.

Speaking in Parliament on Wednesday, Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain said the world's leading industrialized countries should consider expelling Russia permanently from the G-8 grouping. The United States, Britain and their allies in the older G-7 body are meeting in The Hague next week to debate further measures against Russia, which will not be present at the gathering.

"I think it's important that we move together with our allies and partners and I think we should be discussing whether or not to expel Russia permanently from the G-8 if further steps are taken," Mr. Cameron told Parliament, echoing a similar call several weeks ago by Secretary of State John Kerry. "That's the meeting we'll have on Monday and I think that's the right way to proceed."

Before the crisis in Crimea, Mr. Putin was scheduled to host a gathering of the G-8 countries in June in Sochi, where the Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games were held, but Western countries have suspended their participation.

On Thursday, leaders of the 28-nation European Union are scheduled to discuss a response to Russia's moves.

"If we turn away from this crisis and don't act," Mr. Cameron said, "we will pay a very high price in the longer term."

Germany's government, by contrast, has expressed more caution, reflecting its deep intertwined economic relations with Russia. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel took a tough tone with Moscow in public last week, business executives in Germany are reluctant to jeopardize trade ties, and diplomats and officials steeped in decades of conciliation with Russia are hesitant to sever avenues for negotiation. High-level talks scheduled for April have not been canceled.

Nonetheless, the German government spokesman, Steffen Seibert, speaking Wednesday after Ms. Merkel's weekly cabinet meeting, said that Russia was "pursuing a

path of international isolation, and it is a path containing great dangers for the coexistence of states in Europe.”

He also gave the first official response to Mr. Putin’s appeal on Tuesday to ordinary Germans to support what he depicted as Russian reunification, just as Russia had supported German reunification in 1990.

German reunification had brought together two German states, Mr. Seibert said, while “Russia’s intervention by contrast is leading to a division of Ukraine.”

Racing To Deadline, White House Plays To Young In Health Care Push

By Michael D. Shear And Tanzina Vega

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — Russian troops were rolling through Crimea when Denis R. McDonough, the White House chief of staff and a foreign policy expert, was deployed on a mission to do media outreach. But the focus of Mr. McDonough’s calls to local talk radio stations was not geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe, it was health care.

Mr. McDonough chatted with Andy Baskin and Jeff Phelps, hosts of a popular sports talk radio program on WKRK-FM (92.3) in Cleveland, about the coming N.F.L. draft, basketball at the White House and his days playing college football in Minnesota. Mr. McDonough then pitched a new website featuring games, videos and superstar athletes explaining the benefits of health insurance: a sports-themed portal to HealthCare.gov.

“We’ve all seen it happen,” said Mr. McDonough, promoting the portal, GamePlan4Me, to the hosts of “Baskin & Phelps” and their mostly young, mostly male audience. “Somebody’s playing hoops, and they blow out a knee or something. And then all of a sudden, if you don’t have health care, you’re going to bankrupt yourself.”

Convincing millions of young people — especially African-Americans and Latinos — to buy insurance through HealthCare.gov is consuming every spare moment at the White House as President Obama and his aides race against a March 31 deadline, when enrollment ends for the year. They are waging their final public relations push with a zeal that underscores how critical success is for Mr. Obama’s political legacy, and how far behind they remain.

Officials have scaled back their original estimate of signing up seven million people, to six million. But according to enrollment figures released Monday, more than one million sign-ups will be needed to reach the reduced goal by the end of March. And there is concern that the administration still needs a larger proportion of 18- to 34-year-olds, the young and presumably healthy people whom insurance companies need as customers in order to keep premiums reasonable for everyone.

In an effort to reach young men, the White House is trying to turn March Madness into a frenzy about health care coverage as well as basketball. Mr. Obama’s N.C.A.A. tournament bracket, released on Wednesday, was accompanied by a “16 Sweetest Reasons to Get Covered” bracket. LeBron James, the Miami Heat star forward, is starring in 30-second ads promoting HealthCare.gov that will air during the college basketball games.

On Thursday, Mr. Obama will urge daytime TV viewers to sign up for coverage in an appearance on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show” from the White House. In the past three weeks, Mr. Obama has met with YouTube personalities in the Roosevelt Room, hosting some of the younger generation’s online favorites: a science geek, a drunken chef and an Obama impersonator. He dialed into Rickey Smiley’s hip-hop radio show and sat down in the Diplomatic Reception Room for separate interviews with the comedian Zach Galifianakis and a health care expert from WebMD.

“We are going to leave no stone unturned,” said Valerie Jarrett, a senior adviser to the president and the leader of the White House public engagement office, which is coordinating the Affordable Care Act effort. “Our goal is to meet people where they are.”

Michelle Obama urged people to sign up in an appearance at a health center in a black neighborhood in Miami, and made the pitch on ABC’s “Good Morning America.” Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. plugged the health care site at Mary Mac’s Tea Room in Atlanta.

From January until the end of March, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which runs the HealthCare.gov site and administers the Affordable Care Act, will have spent \$52 million on paid media, officials said. Conservative opponents of the law have focused their spending on ads focusing on Democratic candidates and sowing doubts about the viability of the law.

The final push comes at a time when the administration is juggling other priorities. On March 6, at the height of the crisis in Ukraine, Mr. Obama spoke on the phone with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia for an hour before going across town to urge Latinos to enroll during a town-hall meeting at a museum broadcast on three Spanish-language television networks. He returned to the White House a couple of hours later to announce the first sanctions on Russia.

“We’ve organized our outreach in a way so we can take care of the non-A.C.A. business that needs to be taken care of while devoting a great deal of time and energy to this effort,” Ms. Jarrett said.

Outside of Washington, the president’s allies are staging a final surge to enroll as many people as possible.

The targets in the last few days of the campaign are young people and minorities, with a particular focus on Hispanic and black youths — two crucial groups that are more likely to be underinsured, officials said. On a conference

call last week with almost 3,000 pastors, Mr. Obama declared it “crunch time” and asked them to do whatever they could do to urge members of their churches to sign up.

At a small church in the Tampa, Fla., neighborhood of Sulphur Springs, the Rev. Timothy Wynn took up the challenge on Sunday. In front of about 50 parishioners, he delivered a sermon that combined his religious guidance with a pitch for insurance.

“I know you came here for the word of God, and I’m going to give you the word of God,” Mr. Wynn said. But before delivering that word, the pastor asked his parishioners, most of whom are black, to take out their cellphones and text friends to remind them to come to the church and sign up. He also asked them to go to the church’s Facebook page and “like” an open enrollment flier there.

“Can you do that for me?” he said. “God not only cares about our spiritual being, he cares about our physical being as well.”

At the back of the church, All Nations Outreach Center, two health care “navigators” were positioned at tables with stickers and information pamphlets about how to sign up. At the end of the service, about 10 people stopped to ask questions.

Tiffany Pate, 33, a hairstylist in Brandon, Fla., who was the sole person to enroll on site, said that while she already had health insurance, her new plan would save her \$50 a month. “It made sense,” Ms. Pate said of the switch.

In addition to trying to galvanize clergy and black mayors around the country, the Obama administration has been working hard to attract African-Americans and Hispanics through such media efforts as interviews on popular black and Hispanic radio programs like “The Steve Harvey Morning Show” and “Erazno y La Chokolata,” a Spanish-language program based in Los Angeles. It has also begun social media campaigns in English and Spanish and hosted Google chats.

“People get busy in their daily lives,” Ms. Jarrett said. “But as you approach a deadline, it’s easier to get people’s attention and say, ‘O.K., come on now, you only have a few weeks left. It’s time to get serious about this, go on the website, explore your options and sign up.’”

Though the administration is spending heavily on airtime, it is also courting unpaid endorsements that might go viral on the Internet. In late February, nine stars of hit YouTube videos were invited to a conversation about health care at the White House. Among them was Michael Stevens, the star of “Vsauce,” a popular video show about science that regularly gets millions of views online.

“The 15- to 35-year-old group is the heart of my audience,” Mr. Stevens said in an interview. “The White House made it clear they want to talk to everyone.”

His wonky videos ask questions like “Why do we kiss?” and “What if you were born in space?” He is working on a

special video about the science of assessing risk — and the need for insurance.

Another YouTube star at the meeting was Hannah Hart, whose show “My Drunk Kitchen” is irreverent and hugely popular. An episode about making a grilled cheese sandwich while tipsy has gotten more than three million views, and a brunch episode, during which Ms. Hart repeatedly downs mimosas as she cooks pancakes and eggs, has gotten two million. In a video she made after leaving the White House meeting, Ms. Hart plugged the president’s website for her viewers.

“If you want to show your body that you love yourself, go ahead and sign up for health insurance at HealthCare.gov,” she said.

“I’m simply talking to all my friends who are independent business professionals who think they are going to live forever,” she continued. “Get covered!”

Since it was posted on March 4, her video has been seen about 250,000 times.

Michael D. Shear reported from Washington, and Tanzina Vega from Tampa, Fla.

President To Tout Obamacare On ‘Ellen’

By Dylan Byers

[Politico](#), March 20, 2014

As part of his ongoing push to promote the Affordable Care Act, President Obama will appear on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show” via live shot from the White House on March 20, the show’s publicist announced Wednesday.

“This is the president’s first appearance on the show since he has been elected to office,” Melissa Little Padgett wrote in a brief press release. “President Obama will talk to Ellen about Obamacare in an effort to encourage people without health insurance to sign up for coverage.”

President Obama last week appeared on “Between Two Ferns,” the Funny Or Die digital video series, where he touted the benefits of Obamacare during a humorous interview with host Zach Galifianakis.

White House Admits A Fifth Of Obamacare ‘Enrollees’ Won’t Buy Insurance

By Sarah Hurtubise

[Daily Caller](#), March 20, 2014

White House press secretary Jay Carney acknowledged Tuesday that at least a fifth of the five million Obamacare enrollees haven’t actually paid for health insurance.

Carney was asked how many of the enrollments the administration has been touting have paid. “We don’t have specific data that’s, you know, in a reliable enough form to provide,” he concluded.

"We can point you to major insurers who have placed that figure at 80 percent, give-or-take, depending on the insurer," Carney said.

That means at least 20 percent of enrollments, or one million, don't have coverage. Official figures probably won't be released until well after the open enrollment period has passed.

Goldman Sachs analysts estimated last week that while the administration will count 5.5 million to six million people will select plans on Obamacare marketplace, they expect four million to purchase health insurance in the end. They expect just 25 percent of those customers to be previously uninsured.

And consulting firm McKinsey and Company's latest survey found that 77 percent of people who select plans will purchase them before the deadline, with 27 percent of customers having been formerly uninsured. These estimates put total Obamacare insurance coverage at somewhere between 3.85 and four million at the end of March. (RELATED: How many have paid Obamacare premiums?)

Obamacare advertisements are fairly effective at getting people to go to the website and even select a plan. But when it comes to paying a monthly premium, people are much less likely to follow through.

Having missed long ago its original measure of success — seven million enrollments in Obamacare — the health-care law will still be unable to its ratcheted-down goal of six million when it comes to providing people with real health coverage.

Carney refused to answer the original question from Fox News correspondent Ed Henry — why is the administration still calling these people "enrolled?"

States Seek Wiggle Room On Obamacare Deadline

By Tom Howell Jr.

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

The White House insists it is sticking by the March 31 deadline for enrolling in Obamacare, but states are forging plans to try to find extra wiggle-room that could let Americans complete their sign-ups months after the "drop-dead" date passes.

Maryland's health exchange this week announced a plan to let consumers who begin the process but fail to sign up by the end of March have extra time to complete their enrollment. Nevada's exchange said Thursday it will consider a similar 60-day grace period.

And in Washington state, exchange spokeswoman Bethany Frey said customers prevented from enrolling by March 31 because of a system error will have their applications reviewed "on a case-by-case basis."

The state efforts have not been blessed by the Obama administration, which flatly rejected the additional time.

"The deadline is March 31," a Health and Human Services Department spokeswoman said.

But Matthew Lawrence, a fellow at Harvard Law School, said it's no surprise the administration is talking tough now — though it ultimately might find a plausible legal basis to help people bypass the March 31 deadline.

"I expect the administration to wait before announcing any retroactive 'fix' for those who tried and failed for fear that an announcement before the deadline could give people a license to procrastinate," he said.

At the White House, press secretary Jay Carney said the administration is confident it'll have enough sign-ups by the end of the month, including enough young, healthy people, to make the economics of Obamacare work.

Healthier adults are needed to create a balanced risk pool and keep premiums in check when insurers take stock of the first round of enrollment and set prices for the coming year.

"We're confident that come April 1, you will see a demographic mix that is equal to the objective, which is to ensure that actuarially the marketplaces function effectively," Mr. Carney said.

Once final enrollment numbers are known, the next question will be what insurers do with premiums headed into 2015.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius recently told Congress she thinks premiums will rise in the coming year, but at a slower rate than usual because of the law.

Some industry professionals disagreed with Mrs. Sebelius' assessment in news reports, saying premiums could spike multifold in some areas because of the troubled rollout.

Dan Mendelson, CEO of the Avalere health care consultancy in Washington, said a spike in premiums on the Obamacare marketplace is feasible, although likely a "not massive" one, and that the exchanges should remain competitive.

He said the March 31 deadline is in place in part to give companies a chance to take stock of where things are.

"You have to allow plans to reset, think about premiums and have a structured process," he said.

Any tangible spike this year would damage Democratic candidates who supported the law and are up for re-election in November, as Republicans have made it clear they will wield Obamacare's troubles as a truncheon during the mid-term contests.

The law's stumbles are even causing intraparty problems in Maryland, where Democratic candidates to succeed Gov. Martin O'Malley are sparring over the state's glitchy exchange website and the governor is trying to stem any bleeding over the coming days.

On Tuesday, it announced a stopgap measure to help — through telephone guidance — anyone who tried to sign

up by March 31, but couldn't complete their application by that date.

Kentucky's exchange will allow people to apply for coverage by March 31 and pick a plan by April 15, exchange spokeswoman Gwenda Bond said.

Obama's Climate Data Initiative: Congress Gridlocked? Empower The Public.

The Obama administration's Climate Data Initiative, unveiled Wednesday, is a bid to provide the public with as much federal data as possible about climate change.

By Noelle Swan

[Christian Science Monitor](#), March 20, 2014

With Congress shunning legislation to curb global warming, President Obama on Wednesday launched a new online resource to help businesses, citizens, and communities plan for climate change.

The Climate Data Initiative aims to ease access to federal data on climate issues including rises in sea level, storm surges, extreme heat, and drought. The hope is that Americans will use the data to create better public and private preparedness plans.

The website is a work in progress, with some components still under construction. For example, a click on the "coastal flooding" tab yields a description of what will be available, though there is no indication when the data will go live.

The Climate Data Initiative marks a next step on Mr. Obama's pledge last June to address climate change. The president and Democratic leaders have highlighted the issue several times in recent months, despite congressional opposition from most Republicans and red-state Democrats.

"Climate change is a fact," Obama said during his 2014 State of the Union Address. "And when our children's children look us in the eye and ask if we did all we could to leave them a safer, more stable world, with new sources of energy, I want us to be able to say, 'Yes, we did.'"

In June, Obama unveiled a plan to cut carbon emissions 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020, with or without congressional support. He directed the Environmental Protection Agency to strengthen air emissions regulations under the Clean Air Act, a move that Republican leaders have called an overstepping of executive authority.

"I think it's unfortunate, I think it's divisive and quite frankly, borderline unconstitutional on many of those issues," Sen. Marco Rubio (R) of Florida told Politico, following the president's address. "I understand the [legislative] process takes long and can be frustrating, but I think it truly undermines the republic."

Earlier this month, 28 Senate Democrats and two Independents held an all night "talkathon" on climate change

in an attempt to "wake up" Congress and the nation on the issue.

With little chance of congressional compromise in sight, the president appears to be appealing instead to the American public.

While nearly two-thirds of Americans believe global warming is happening, just under half of the country believes that humans are to blame, according to a survey conducted by researchers at Yale University in New Haven, Conn.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the international nonprofit organization and publisher of Science magazine, has also shifted its education efforts from policymakers to American citizens.

AAAS launched its own website this week in an effort to bring the scientific evidence for climate change directly to the people.

While the government portal is a text-heavy catalog of federal databases, AAAS's What We Know report is a visually rich, multimedia product that makes the case for climate change with video interviews.

"Climate change is not about the polar bears. It's about your kids and my kids. It's about the price of Cheerios and cereal," says Marshall Shepherd, a geography professor at the University of Georgia and former president of the American Meteorological Society, in one of the interviews. "It's not a political issue. It's an issue of human beings, their kids, and their future."

White House Goes Local On Climate Change

By Timothy Cama

[The Hill](#), March 20, 2014

White House officials launched a new initiative Wednesday that they said would help local communities plan for the effects of climate change by providing them with troves of government data.

The Obama administration hopes to "leverage open data resources and other data sets to make communities more resilient," White House adviser John Podesta told reporters.

The first data set made available Wednesday on [Climate.data.gov](#)

maps expectations for changes in coastal flooding and sea levels in an attempt to help localities prepare, Podesta said.

"Hundreds of thousands of infrastructure and geographical features across the U.S. will be made public by the [U.S. Geological Survey], the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency," Podesta said. "These data will be crucial to helping communities prepare for floods and other climate impacts."

John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said the data release fits into

the president's climate agenda, which includes making communities tougher toward the climate change effects that cannot be avoided.

"People are going to need to understand what is happening and what is likely to happen in order to manage and minimize the impact of those changes," Holdren said. "And good data in forms that are accessible, usable and comfortable are essential to that process."

The White House invited representatives from Esri and Google Inc. to speak about what they are doing to help the cause.

Esri is making detailed city maps available in a form that municipal planners can use, "so that people who are working on keyboards doing management in planning departments or emergency responder departments in local governments ... can read this new geographic information directly into their workflows," Jack Dangermond, president of Esri, told reporters.

Esri's data is already available, Dangermond said, but the new initiative will make it more readable and usable for cities.

Google is donating a petabyte of storage, or a million megabytes, to host open climate data, said Rebecca Moore, engineering director for Google's Earth Engine.

Google has previously released very detailed elevation maps to help people understand granular predictions about rising sea levels, Moore said. It has also mapped other effects of climate change, like shrinking forests.

"There had never before been a place you could go and ask 'where is there deforestation happening?'" Moore said. "People are hungry for this information."

The White House will unveil future data sets to boost resilience to other effects of climate change, Podesta said, though he declined to go into details.

"Increasing preparedness and resilience so regions, communities, businesses and individuals would be better able to address and manage the impacts of changes in climate that we're no longer able to avoid. Climate change is already under way," Holdren said, adding that increases in droughts, wildfires, unusual heat and flooding can all be traced to climate change.

The Commerce Department wants to unleash the power of "big data," but it's looking for the public's help.

On Monday, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released a formal request asking for private companies to help make its immense amounts of data on the air, oceans and climate available to the public.

"We are, I think, fundamentally an environmental intelligence agency," NOAA Administrator Kathryn Sullivan told The Hill.

The agency uses vast networks of buoys, weather stations, satellites, ships and aircraft to monitor conditions from the surface of the sun to the ocean floor.

The problem, though, is not all that data is not making it out to the public.

Of the 20 terabytes (TB) of information the agency collects each day – an amount Sullivan noted was twice the size of the printed records in the Library of Congress – just about 2 TB are available to the public.

Through the request for information, NOAA wants to change that.

"Our notion is very simple: we're asking the private sector to help us figure out how we can unleash the power of NOAA's data," Sullivan said.

The agency is inviting companies of all shapes and sizes to help make that data more available to anyone who wants it, from academics to private companies. Once made public, information about the planet could help scientists, startups or massive corporations alike.

"We look at these data as a public good," Sullivan said.

"They've been collected through public means. The American people in a sense already own them. I think an ideal model from our point of view would be one that preserves that characteristic of the data being a public good and really sort of turns it into an open innovation platform that anyone could have at."

NOAA's effort is part of a broader trend to take advantage of the benefits of analyzing huge amounts of data at the Commerce Department and throughout the Obama administration.

Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker has declared data one of the four core principles of the department's operating agenda.

President Obama has also tapped John Podesta, a top counselor, to lead a review of big data and privacy.

A White House-ordered privacy review group will focus its attention on the private sector's use of data, rather than the government's, according to the group's leader.

By focusing on companies, the group hopes to "get a more holistic view of the state of the technology," John Podesta, White House counselor, said Monday at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Podesta was charged with leading the government review of "big data" earlier this year, as President Obama announced plans to reform government surveillance programs. Monday's event is the first of three university-based events being co-hosted by Podesta's review group.

The review group has roughly three months to produce a report analyzing the state of "big data" practices, predict future uses and determine how well current policies fit with those practices and uses.

Although the review was announced as Obama focused on reforming government surveillance practices, including at the National Security Agency, Podesta said Monday that his group will focus on the private sector, while others will focus on the public sector.

The reviews of government surveillance programs are happening on a “somewhat separate track,” Podesta said, pointing to a White House-ordered review being led by Attorney General Eric Holder and members of the intelligence community.

By “looking at this beyond just the intelligence community,” the big data review group “may help inform intelligence policy going forward,” Podesta said, “but really I think that these are parallel tracks.”

Podesta said his review will focus on whether policy updates are needed to account for the vast amounts of data that can be collected and analyzed due to advances in technology, including the capabilities of the Internet.

“There is more data than ever before and [there are] no signs that the trajectory is slowing its upward pace,” he said, pointing to Facebook and YouTube uploads.

“We want to explore whether there’s something truly new in the vast collection of data and lightning-speed analytics.”

Podesta said that the review process will engage with “a broad range” of stakeholders, including members of the international community.

Some international governments, including members of the European Union and Brazil, have called for limitations on the presence of U.S. tech companies in the hopes of keeping their citizens’ data out of the hands of U.S. intelligence agencies.

Podesta pledged to push back against those kinds of proposals.

That kind of segregation of the Internet “would be a mistake with respect to both the capacity for innovation but also for the free flow of information and ideas,” he said.

“We’ll be looking to hear from them ... but I remain convinced that we can find a way to sort of accommodate each other’s perspective,” he said, pointing to ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and European countries over an agreement that allows U.S. tech companies to process data belonging to European citizens.

“I think that those discussions have been positive, so I think we just need to find a way that’s appropriate for both ... cultures,” Podesta said.

White House Launches Climate Data Initiative

By Juliet Eilperin

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

The White House launched an initiative Wednesday aimed at expanding the use of climate data nationwide, to help communities cope with the impacts of global warming.

The effort includes making federal data more accessible through [climate.data.gov](#) and launching a design competition to demonstrate the extent to which Americans are vulnerable to coastal flooding. The administration also is releasing new federal map data to depict which parts of the

nation’s infrastructure are vulnerable to climate change, and is enlisting Google, Esri and other private firms to distribute and store data.

White House counselor John D. Podesta and presidential science adviser John P. Holdren told reporters the initiative would allow government officials and businesses to prepare for rising sea levels, flooding and drought.

“This begins to make clearer what the risks are of inaction,” Podesta said.

The idea of creating a centralized climate data center dates back to 2006, during the Bush administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration formally proposed its creation in 2010. NOAA’s administrator at the time, Jane Lubchenco, called it a National Climate Service, since it is modeled loosely on the National Weather Service.

Congress, which was controlled by Democrats, called for an independent review of the proposal. But Republicans later rejected the plan after taking control of the House.

In an interview Wednesday, Lubchenco called the effort “very timely. As we saw at NOAA the requests for information are just escalating exponentially . . . It’s not just data, it is being able to visualize it, to manipulate it, and to tailor it to the decisions you are making.”

Holdren said the effort is “broader” than the 2010 plan and “brought more resources to bear” by involving other agencies as well as the private sector.

The climate service has practical appeal beyond the political dispute over global warming: NOAA signed a memorandum of understanding with the Western Governors Association in June 2011 to provide them with climate data on drought and other issues.

Jack Dangermond, chief executive of the software firm Esri, said his company had already analyzed how a one-meter rise in sea level would affect the New York City area; 780,000 people would be displaced.

But the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, an industry group that opposes federal limits on carbon dioxide, said the idea is part of an effort to justify stricter regulations based on the prospect of harmful climate impact. While the data initiative will come out of agencies’ existing budgets, the group said the administration is already spending too much on infrastructure in the name of climate readiness.

“Even as millions of Americans experience continued economic plight, the White House is expending enormous resources, including billions in taxpayer dollars, on the president’s pet project: ‘climate change preparedness,’ “ the group’s spokeswoman Laura Sheehan said in a statement. “The administration’s new climate change Web site will further bolster its fear-inducing vision of the future, which sounds more and more like a scene out of a Hollywood movie.”

Some private firms are joining with the administration to launch the initiative. Esri will work with the District and 11

other cities to create free “maps and apps” for state and local planning officials. The technology giant Google will donate 1,000 terabytes of cloud storage for climate data, along with 50 million hours of high-performance computing.

Mary Glackin, a longtime career official at NOAA who served as the agency’s acting administrator at the start of the Obama administration, said it was important to enlist the help of the private sector to modernize the way businesses and consumers access climate data. “Our climate services are back in the 1940s, and our problems are really the problems of today,” she said.

Dawn Zimmer, the Democratic mayor of Hoboken, N.J., which was hit hard by Hurricane Sandy, said in a statement that the move allows her city to conduct “a data-driven analysis” of flooding risks and solutions.

“As we work with a team of experts to make Hoboken more resilient, it is critical that we have the tools and data necessary to anticipate the impacts of climate change,” she said.

Obama Keystone Choice Pits Donors Against At-Risk Senate

By Julianna Goldman

[Bloomberg News](#), March 20, 2014

President Barack Obama’s advisers are lining up against the proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline. Top Democratic donors oppose the project. And Obama himself dismisses claims that it will create many jobs.

Yet there’s still one big obstacle to the president saying no to Keystone: election-year politics.

If Obama rejects the pipeline, it might sink Democratic candidates in states with big energy industries, such as Louisiana and Alaska. That could cost Democrats control of the Senate – a risk that’s likely to weigh heavily on any decision the president makes, to approve the pipeline, reject it or wait till after November to announce a decision.

Related: Keystone Foes Take Aim at Maryland Natural Gas Project

“If Obama approves the pipeline, he alienates environmentalists and the left; if he rejects it, he really hurts a number of endangered Democratic senators,” said Charlie Cook, publisher of the nonpartisan Cook Political Report. “The path of least resistance would be to continue to punt the decision until after the midterm election.”

Senior Obama advisers Valerie Jarrett and Dan Pfeiffer have indicated privately they oppose the pipeline, according to several people who asked for anonymity to discuss the matter. John Podesta, Obama’s counselor on climate and energy policy, has said he won’t be involved in the decision, although he was publicly against the project before joining the administration in January.

“The president knows my views on Keystone,” Podesta told reporters at a briefing today. “But I said I wouldn’t work on it, and I’m not working on it.”

The White House declined to discuss individuals’ views. Overstated Rhetoric

Obama hasn’t said publicly where he stands. Yet he has come to believe the fight has transcended the pipeline’s actual importance, according to people familiar with his thinking. He considers the rhetoric coming from both sides – the environmental activists who oppose the project and the labor and business groups in favor of it – overstated, they say.

Moving Crude Through the Pipes

That increases the weight of the political calculation.

The president told a meeting of governors on Feb. 24 that he’d decide on Keystone within “a couple” of months. That surprised some Democratic consultants, pollsters and political strategists, who said they didn’t expect a decision so soon. When asked about it later, administration officials said that the timing was still fluid.

During the last several weeks, the president has grown more aware of the possibility of his party’s losing control of the Senate, people close to the White House said. Election Risk

A decision against the pipeline might mean defeat for Senate Democrats seeking re-election in Arkansas, Alaska, North Carolina and especially Louisiana, where Mary Landrieu, chairman of the energy committee, is fighting for political survival.

“It would cement the image of this president having an anti-business agenda and hurt these senators with swing voters and rally business against them,” said Cook.

Polling last month showed Senators Landrieu, North Carolina’s Kay Hagan and Arkansas’s Mark Pryor locked in tight races against Republican opponents, with Keystone swaying voter decision-making. The lawmakers have all urged Obama to approve the pipeline.

Forty-five percent of likely voters in Louisiana said they’d be less inclined to support Landrieu if Obama denied the permit to construct the pipeline, according to surveys conducted by Democratic pollster Hickman Analytics Inc. and sponsored by the Consumer Energy Alliance, a group that’s pushing for the pipeline to be built. Twenty-three percent said they’d be more likely, and 78 percent said energy issues, including Keystone, would help determine how they’d vote. Permit Delay

In Arkansas, 46 percent of likely voters said they’d be less inclined to vote for Pryor if Obama rejected Keystone; in North Carolina, 49 percent said they’d be less likely to vote for Hagan. Republicans need to gain six seats to win control of the Senate.

TransCanada Corp. (TRP) of Calgary applied more than five years ago for a permit to build the \$5.4 billion

pipeline through the U.S. heartland, connecting oil sands in Alberta with refineries along the coast of Texas and Louisiana. The 875-mile pipeline would run from the U.S.-Canada border to Steele City, Nebraska. From there it would connect to an existing pipeline network.

The State Department is overseeing a review to determine whether the project is in the U.S. national interest, weighing its impact on energy security, local economies and foreign relations. That process, which gives agencies up to 90 days to weigh in, began last month after the department published its Jan. 31 environmental review that found limited impact on climate-changing carbon emissions. No Deadlines

The 90-day period ends in mid-May to early June, according to a State Department official, though the Department isn't under any deadline to make its recommendation to Obama.

One element that may complicate that timing is a Nebraska judge's Feb. 19 decision to invalidate the pipeline's route through the state. TransCanada now needs the approval of the state Public Service Commission, a process that can take seven months.

The State Department official, who requested anonymity to discuss the case, said the two processes aren't linked. The department is monitoring the litigation in Nebraska while moving ahead with its review.

The State Department's environmental report released Jan. 31 found limited impact on climate-changing carbon emissions, saying the oil sands in Alberta will be developed anyway. Building the pipeline would directly and indirectly support about 42,100 jobs for a year or two. Afterward, about 35 permanent jobs would remain, the report said. 'No Evidence'

During an interview with the New York Times last July, Obama dismissed the employment benefits. "Republicans have said this would be a big jobs generator," he said. "There is no evidence that that's true."

The president has said he will let the formal process play out.

Matt Leirich, a White House spokesman, said the process for evaluating the project is at the State Department.

"President Obama clearly stated that the project will be in the national interest only if it does not significantly exacerbate the problem of carbon pollution," Leirich said. No decision will be made until the environmental impact statement is reviewed, and the public and other agency heads weigh in, he said.

If Obama approves the pipeline before November, he potentially helps his party retain control of the Senate. At the same time, he risks turning off supporters such as billionaire Tom Steyer, the Democrats' primary financing weapon against Republican groups, including the billionaire Koch Brothers. Undercutting Agenda

"If we're collectively going to put \$100 million into this cycle, how much will go into key races depends on Keystone," said Chris Lehane, a Democratic strategist who's advising Steyer.

Should he approve the pipeline, Obama also risks undercutting his climate-change agenda domestically and internationally by sending a signal to the world that the U.S. is helping Canada export dirty energy.

It potentially threatens his legacy on the issue. As the White House looks toward the next round of climate talks in 2015, Obama's decision on Keystone could also affect his ability to rally other nations around committing to further emissions cuts.

Senate Jobless Benefits Plan Poses Problems – State Agencies

By David Lawder

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

John Boehner Pans Senate Jobless Aid Bill

By Burgess Everett

[Politico](#), March 20, 2014

Speaker John Boehner on Wednesday criticized the Senate's bipartisan unemployment insurance proposal as riddled with "serious problems" after a group of state officials said the bill may be unworkable.

Citing an analysis by a group of state unemployment insurance directors, Boehner said the Senate's legislation likely doesn't meet House standards that a jobless aid package be fiscally responsible and help create jobs. The speaker's comments dampen any prospect that the Senate's five-month, retroactive unemployment insurance extension will become law, even if the bill passes the Senate.

"There is no evidence that the bill being rammed through the Senate by [Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid] meets that test, and according to these state directors, the bill is also simply unworkable," Boehner said Wednesday. "Frankly, a better use of the Senate's time would be taking up and passing the dozens of House-passed jobs bills still awaiting action."

Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.), who has led Senate negotiations along with Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.), said through a spokesperson that he would try to work to assuage Boehner's concerns but was disappointed with Wednesday's events.

"No matter what solution is reached, there is some excuse to deny these much-needed benefits. I look forward to passing this proposal out of the Senate next week, and stand ready to help the Speaker, as well as any organization or any

individual necessary, in order to make this extension a reality," Heller said.

The speaker's critique immediately followed the release of a letter sent to Reid, a Nevada Democrat and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) by the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, which found that the proposed revival of long-term job benefits touted by Senate negotiators last week would actually "substantially increase the administrative burden on states" if signed into law.

The bill's provisions "would cause considerable delays in the implementation of the program and increased administrative issues and costs. Some states have indicated they might decide such changes are not feasible in the short time available, and therefore would consider not signing the U.S. Department of Labor's agreement to operate the program," the letter read.

Boehner's comments and the state analysis dumped cold water on the Senate's hard-fought, paid-for compromise to restore long-term jobless aid through May, bolster job-training programs and prevent millionaires from drawing unemployment benefits. After two months of failed votes and tough partisan rhetoric, five Republicans and five Democrats introduced a compromise bill Thursday that the White House endorsed and most believe can garner 60 votes to pass the Senate.

Now, that could be as far as the effort will go, which infuriates House Democrats who have been pushing for weeks to get a vote on unemployment insurance.

"Obviously, the Administration would have to issue guidance to the states as has been done in past extensions. Using these relatively minor concerns to continue to justify leaving more than two million people out in the cold further illustrates that unemployed Americans are invisible to House Republicans," said Drew Hammill, a spokesman for Senate Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

In the letter, the state group says by the time some states are ready to implement the bill, the Senate's extension would already be expired because of how long it takes to program states' "antiquated" computer systems. The group also said that many states would require legislative action to implement the bill's reforms, a problem because some legislatures' sessions are winding down or have already concluded.

NASWA also said that the much vaunted millionaire prohibition "would be very hard to administer" and that the retroactive nature of the benefits would "make it nearly impossible" for states to confirm that unemployment claimants have been searching for a job for the past three months.

Jake Sherman contributed to this report.

Dems Assail Boehner Over Jobless Aid

By Russell Berman

[The Hill](#), March 20, 2014

Democrats on Wednesday assailed Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) for opposing a Senate agreement to extend emergency unemployment benefits for five months.

Boehner criticized the deal as "unworkable," citing a letter from the National Association of State Workforce Agencies – circulated by his office – that said states would have difficulty implementing it.

"The serious problems with the Senate legislation being noted by these state directors – the state employees charged with actually implementing the Senate unemployment insurance legislation if it were to become law – are cause for serious concern," Boehner said.

A bipartisan group of senators struck the agreement last week after months of on-and-off negotiations about a program that lapsed in late December. The legislation would provide retroactive payments to people who were eligible for unemployment insurance earlier in the year, and it would extend the program through June. It also would prohibit anyone with an income of \$1 million or higher in the previous year from receiving unemployment checks.

The Senate could vote on the bill as soon as next week, a source told The Hill.

Yet Boehner's statement suggested the measure has no future in the House even if it clears the Senate.

"We believe the concerns that have been expressed are resolvable and we look forward to Speaker Boehner coming to the table to find solutions," said Adam Jentleson, a spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.). "It is hard to imagine Speaker Boehner simply walking away from the thousands of people in Ohio who lost their jobs through no fault of their own and need this lifeline to make ends meet while they continue to look for work."

Drew Hammill, a spokesman for House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), suggested Boehner was using the letter from the state directors as an excuse to oppose an extension of unemployment benefits.

"Obviously, the administration would have to issue guidance to the states as has been done in past extensions," Hammill said. "Using these relatively minor concerns to continue to justify leaving more than two million people out in the cold further illustrates that unemployed Americans are invisible to House Republicans."

In his letter Wednesday, the trade group for state unemployment insurance directors warned of "considerable delays" in implementing the Senate proposal.

The trade group has not taken a formal position on the agreement, but its letter on Wednesday raised a number of concerns.

"The requirements in S. 2148 would cause considerable delays in the implementation of the program and increased administrative issues and costs," NASWA president Mark

Henry wrote to Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). "Some states have indicated they might decide such changes are not feasible in the short time available, and therefore would consider not signing the U.S. Department of Labor's agreement to operate the program."

Henry said the legislation could take a majority of states between one and three months to implement, further delaying benefits for recipients. And he suggested the "millionaire provision" and the backdating of claims to Dec. 29 would be unworkable.

Vicki Needham contributed.

Tax-Break Revival Said To Get U.S. Senate Committee Vote

By Richard Rubin

[Bloomberg News](#), March 20, 2014

The U.S. Senate Finance Committee probably will vote during the week of March 31 to revive dozens of tax breaks that expired Dec. 31, said a Democratic aide to the panel.

The breaks include the research and development credit and a provision that lets companies including Citigroup Inc. and General Electric Co. defer U.S. taxes on some of their foreign income.

Other expired breaks include the production tax credit for wind energy and a tax credit for manufacturers of energy-efficient appliances such as Whirlpool Corp.

The tax-break vote will be the first test for Senator Ron Wyden, the Oregon Democrat who became the Finance Committee's chairman last month.

The panel hasn't decided whether to extend the breaks through the end of 2014 or 2015, said the aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity when discussing the committee's yet-to-be-announced plans. Wyden's proposal probably will exclude or refine some of the 55 breaks, the aide said, with a goal to produce a bipartisan bill.

No decisions have been made on the content of the measure or the timing for a committee session and vote, said Julia Lawless, a spokeswoman for Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, the panel's top Republican. Cutting 'Fat'

"When it comes to tax extenders, Senator Hatch believes there's a lot of fat that needs to be cut and that Congress should not continue to deal with them in a business-as-usual manner," Lawless said in an e-mailed statement. "A committee markup would provide an opportunity to expose these provisions to scrutiny and sunlight."

Hatch has called for individual scrutiny of the expired measures. "I'm going to insist that we cut back rather than just keep all of them," he told reporters in early January. "We should do only the ones that we really should do."

Wyden has made reviving the lapsed breaks his first goal since taking over for Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat who is now the U.S. ambassador to China.

The path forward after a committee vote or Senate passage isn't clear.

House Republicans have said they won't consider a short-term extension of the breaks. In that chamber, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp, a Michigan Republican, on Feb. 26 released a draft revamp of the entire U.S. tax code. Research, Development

"I am not going to sacrifice important matters like research and development and innovation on the altar of perhaps some inaction on comprehensive reform," Wyden said Feb. 13 on Bloomberg Television's "Political Capital with Al Hunt."

A one-year extension would cost the government \$46 billion or \$47 billion in revenue, the aide said.

Many of the provisions have broad bipartisan support. Others, including the wind credit and accelerated depreciation for motorsports tracks, divide U.S. lawmakers.

Some tax breaks have influential backers either on the committee or in the Senate.

For example, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell has supported a lapsed provision that shortens the depreciation period for race horses, an issue that's important to the horse industry in his home state of Kentucky.

Senator Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat, has focused on a lapsed provision that allows mass-transit commuters to receive as much as \$250 in tax-free benefits a month, up from the current \$130.

Fed Cuts Bond Purchases By Another \$10 Billion, As Expected

By Binyamin Appelbaum

[New York Times](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve further curtailed its economic stimulus campaign Wednesday, announcing as expected that it would reduce its monthly bond purchases because of the progress of the economic recovery.

The Fed emphasized, however, that it expected to continue the centerpiece of its stimulus campaign, the suppression of short-term interest rates. It said that rates would remain at the current level, near zero, "for a considerable time" after it stops adding to its bond holdings, particularly if inflation remains sluggish.

That replaced the Fed's previous guidance that it would keep rates near zero at least as long as the official unemployment rate remained above 6.5 percent. With unemployment approaching that threshold, Janet L. Yellen, the Fed's chairwoman, said that the central bank had

concluded that more was needed because the economy remains weak.

"Progress in the labor market has been faster than anticipated while inflation has been lower than expected," Ms. Yellen said at the press conference, her first as the head of the central bank.

The Fed will add \$55 billion in April to its holdings of Treasury and mortgage-backed securities, down from \$65 billion in March and \$85 billion in December, the central bank's policy-making committee said in a statement released after a two-day meeting.

In a separate set of economic forecasts, also published Wednesday, Fed officials consolidated around the view that the central bank would begin to raise short-term rates in 2015. That was the view of 13 of the 16 officials who submitted forecasts.

The steady course of Fed policy reflected the continued confidence of its officials that the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession. The statement said that "growth in economic activity slowed during the winter months, in part reflecting adverse weather conditions." But it added that the Fed regarded its current efforts as sufficient to produce gradual improvement in the economy, reductions in unemployment and a revival in the low pace of inflation.

Predictions that the economy would grow more quickly in 2014 have not come true. Cold weather and winter storms in some parts of the country appear to have suppressed economic activity. Car sales, for example, fell sharply in January in the coldest parts of the country, according to a recent analysis. But it is not clear whether the difficult winter is a complete explanation. Growth has repeatedly disappointed the Fed's expectations in recent years, and officials have said that judging the impact of the cold will take time — and warmer weather.

The labor market remains weak. The share of adults with jobs has barely increased since the recession, and many people have stopped looking for work, driving the decline in the official unemployment rate.

Inflation also remains sluggish. The Fed's preferred measure of inflation rose just 1.1 percent during the 12 months ending in January, well below the 2 percent annual pace the Fed has established as its target. Officials see this as a symptom of the broader economic malaise, and they expect inflation to increase alongside the economy. But the Fed in recent months has communicated growing concern about the trend, highlighting in policy statements that it will act if necessary to raise inflation back to what it regards as a healthier pace.

Yet Fed officials remain optimistic about growth in the second half of the year, and eager to halt the expansion of the Fed's bond holdings.

The economic forecasts published Wednesday showed few changes in comparison with the last forecasts in

December. Officials expect slightly softer growth and a slightly faster decline in the official unemployment rate. The forecast now predicts growth no faster than 3 percent in 2014, compared to a December forecast of up to 3.2 percent; unemployment is predicted to fall as low as 6.1 percent, rather than 6.3 percent.

Those two trends normally move in opposite directions. But economic weakness since the Great Recession has steadily reduced the unemployment rate by convincing people without jobs to stop looking for work.

Fed officials now forecast that the unemployment rate in 2016 will reach a new equilibrium between 5.2 and 5.6 percent, meaning that they do not believe the rate can be further reduced without precipitating inflation. That is about a percentage point higher than the pre-recession rate.

"We've been changing our near-term forecast a lot, but I haven't really changed my forecast on the second half of this year or 2015," John Williams, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, said this month. "My own view is that the data have not in any way moved against the basic contours of the forecast."

The Fed expanded its holdings of Treasury and mortgage-backed securities by \$85 billion each month last year. It cut back to \$75 billion in January, and again to \$65 billion in February and March. Fed officials have said that they intend to complete the process of gradual cuts by the fall unless the economic outlook changes sharply. William C. Dudley, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, said this month that the Fed would hold course so long as growth remained between 0 and 5 percent a year.

As a result, the Fed's focus has turned almost entirely to its management of short-term interest rates, which it has held near zero since December 2008.

In December 2012, the Fed said that it intended to keep short-term rates near zero at least as long as unemployment, which was 7.9 percent at the time, remained above 6.5 percent. Officials have since concluded that the rapid fall in the official unemployment rate — to 6.7 percent in February — overstates the labor market's recovery. In December, the committee took a first step toward clarifying its plans once the threshold is crossed, declaring "that it likely will be appropriate to maintain the current target range for the federal funds rate well past the time that the unemployment rate declines below 6½ percent."

As it considers how much more to do, the Fed also faces bubbling concerns about the stability of financial markets. The Fed is trying to strike a delicate balance between encouraging risk taking, and preventing the kinds of excesses that could produce a financial crisis with broad economic consequences.

Ms. Yellen and other senior Fed officials have said repeatedly that they are watching closely and see little reason for alarm. "I'd say my general assessment at this point is I

can't see threats to financial stability that have built to the point of flashing orange or red," Ms. Yellen said at a House committee hearing last month.

Fed May Raise Rates As Soon As Next Spring, Yellen Suggests

By Ann Saphir And Krista Hughes

[Reuters](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Fed Links Rate To Range Of Data, To Keep Policy Easy

By Jeff Kearns

[Bloomberg News](#), March 20, 2014

The Federal Reserve gave itself room to keep borrowing costs low at least until next year by dropping a linkage between the benchmark interest rate and a specific level of unemployment.

"We know we're not close to full employment, not close to an employment level consistent with our mandate, and unless inflation were a significant concern, we wouldn't dream of raising the federal funds rate target," Chair Janet Yellen said today after her first time leading a meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee.

In deciding how long to keep rates low, the committee will look at a "wide range of information," including labor market conditions, inflation expectations and financial markets, she said. The Fed also reduced the monthly pace of bond purchases by \$10 billion, to \$55 billion.

Treasury yields climbed while stocks fell for the first time in three days as Yellen said the central bank's stimulus program could end this fall and benchmark interest rates could rise six months later.

Related: U.S. Stocks Fall as Fed Tapers, Forecasts Higher Rates

The FOMC statement repeated that the federal funds rate will stay low for a "considerable time" after asset purchases end. Asked in the press conference to specify how long that might be, Yellen said: "you know, this is the kind of term it's hard to define, but, you know, it probably means something on the order of around six months or that type of thing."

The 10-year note yield rose 10 basis points, or 0.10 percentage point, to 2.77 percent as of 4:15 p.m. in New York. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index fell 0.6 percent to 1,860.77. Overhauling Guidance

The Fed is overhauling forward guidance after unemployment declined toward 6.5 percent, its previous threshold for a rate increase, faster than policy makers predicted. Yellen last month told lawmakers that the

unemployment rate alone isn't an adequate gauge of economic health and "there's a great deal of slack in the labor markets still that we need to work to eliminate."

Quarterly forecasts by Fed policy makers also showed more officials predicting the benchmark rate, now close to zero, would rise at least to 1 percent at the end of 2015 and 2.25 percent by the end of the following year.

Yellen downplayed the importance of the forecasts.

"These dots are going to move up and down over time," she said in a reference to the forecasts, which are illustrated as dots on a chart. They moved up "ever so slightly," she added. "The committee's views on policy will likely evolve."

The FOMC repeated that it will reduce asset purchases "in further measured steps at future meetings." At the same time, "asset purchases are not on a preset course." The committee announced \$10 billion reductions in purchases at the previous two meetings.

"Growth in economic activity slowed during the winter months, in part reflecting adverse weather conditions," the Fed said. Even so, "there is sufficient underlying strength in the broader economy to support ongoing improvement in labor-market conditions."

The central bank's preferred gauge of consumer prices climbed 1.2 percent in the year through January and hasn't exceeded its 2 percent goal since March 2012. That gives policy makers "ample scope to continue to try to promote a return to full employment," Yellen testified to lawmakers Feb. 27.

Minneapolis Fed President Narayana Kocherlakota dissented, saying the statement "weakens the credibility of the committee's commitment to return inflation to the 2 percent target from below and fosters policy uncertainty that hinders economic activity." Economist Survey

Seventy-six percent of economists in a Bloomberg survey March 14-17 predicted the Fed would drop its unemployment threshold. Economists also predicted a \$10 billion reduction in the monthly pace of bond purchases, according to the median of responses. Source: FOMC via Bloomberg

In deciding how long to keep rates low, the committee will look at a "wide range of... [Read More](#)

In deciding how long to keep rates low, the committee will look at a "wide range of information," including labor market conditions, inflation expectations and financial markets, Chair Janet Yellen said.

In deciding how long to keep rates low, the committee will look at a "wide range of information," including labor market conditions, inflation expectations and financial markets, Chair Janet Yellen said.

Yellen, 67, took over as Fed chair last month after three years as deputy to Ben S. Bernanke. In that role, she helped shape the communications policies the Fed wielded as it

sought to nurture a recovery from the worst recession since the Great Depression.

After cutting interest rates to zero in 2008, the Fed embarked on large-scale asset purchases as well as forward guidance intended to convince investors that borrowing costs would stay low for a long time.

Starting in December 2012, the FOMC said the federal funds rate would stay low at least as long as unemployment was higher than 6.5 percent and the outlook for inflation didn't exceed 2.5 percent. **Becoming Obsolete**

With the jobless rate at 6.7 percent last month, that guidance was fast becoming obsolete.

"It's a relic of days of yore," Brian Jacobsen, who helps oversee \$241 billion as chief portfolio strategist at Wells Fargo Advantage Funds in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, said before the FOMC statement.

Policy makers met this week as economic reports indicated the world's largest economy is pulling out of a slowdown linked to unusually harsh winter weather.

Factory production rose in February by the most in six months as assembly lines churned out more cars, business equipment and chemicals, a month after snowstorms hampered deliveries of parts and materials.

Employers last month added more workers than projected following the weakest two-month hiring gain in more than a year. The jobless rate rose from 6.6 percent, a five-year low, as more people entered the workforce. Retail Sales

Retail sales climbed in February for the first time in three months, claims for unemployment benefits declined and consumer confidence improved, reports showed last week.

"The economy is getting better, and it's likely the softer patch we're seeing is weather related," Josh Feinman, the New York-based global chief economist for Deutsche Asset & Wealth Management and a former Fed senior economist, said before the statement. "I don't know that all the headwinds are gone, but they're clearly blowing with a lot less intensity."

Consumers are getting a boost from stock-market gains fueled by the Fed's unprecedented stimulus. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index rose yesterday to 1,872.25, near the 1,878.04 record March 7. The S&P jumped 30 percent last year for the best advance since 1997. **Scaling Back**

As the economy improves, the Fed is slowly scaling back the large-scale bond purchases that have expanded its balance sheet to a record \$4.18 trillion. The purchases have prompted concern among some policy makers that the Fed is fueling asset-price bubbles.

The Fed on Dec. 18 announced its first reduction in bond purchases, to \$75 billion from \$85 billion, then followed up with an equal cut in January to \$65 billion.

"The task for monetary policy will be to provide continued support as long as necessary, and to return policy to a normal stance over time without sparking inflation or

financial instability," Fed Governor Jerome Powell told lawmakers last week. "This will require a careful balancing, as there are risks from removing monetary accommodation too soon as well as too late."

Fed Lays Groundwork For A Future Rate Hike

By Ylan Q. Mui

[Washington Post](#), March 20, 2014

The Federal Reserve began laying the groundwork Wednesday for the first increase in interest rates since the Great Recession upended the economy.

The nation's central bank said it will consider a broad swath of indicators to determine the moment of liftoff, including job market data, inflation expectations and financial developments. The official statement was a retreat from the blanket assurances that rates would remain untouched, which have dominated the Fed's message for the past five years. Instead, the debate has shifted to how much longer the Fed should wait before pulling the trigger.

Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, Fed Chair Janet L. Yellen cast the shift as merely a change in semantics, not policy. The central bank's target for interest rates has been at zero since 2008, and most Fed officials think the first increase will occur next year.

"Monetary policy will be geared to evolving conditions in the economy," Yellen said. "And the public does need to understand that as those views evolve, the committee's views on policy will likely evolve with them."

Communicating those intentions clearly without roiling the markets has proved challenging for the once-secretive institution. On Wednesday, Yellen suggested that the first rate hike could come "something on the order of around six months" after the Fed stops pumping money into the economy through its bond-buying program this fall. She qualified that, saying the decision will be dependent on economic data, but Wall Street seized on the time frame as a suggestion that the move will come earlier than expected. The major indexes ended the day down more than half a percentage point.

Officials will try "to provide as much clarity as is reasonably certain, given that the economic developments in the economy are themselves uncertain," Yellen said Wednesday. "But we will try as hard as we can not to be a source of instability here."

The Fed sets the target for what is known as the federal funds rate, which determines how much banks can charge to lend to each other overnight. That rate influences the pricing of a broad array of business and consumer loans, including mortgages and car notes.

The central bank began cutting that interest rate in the fall of 2007 amid emerging signs of the financial turmoil that would usher in the worst economic downturn in the United States since the Great Depression. It continued to slash rates

over the next year — the financial equivalent of flooring the gas pedal in hopes of keeping the economy from wrecking. In December 2008, the federal funds rate hit zero.

But the Fed struggled to convince wary investors that it had no intention of letting its foot off the accelerator anytime soon. To reassure markets, the central bank made a series of increasingly definitive promises that it would leave interest rates untouched. Most recently, it vowed not to raise rates at least until the unemployment rate hit 6.5 percent.

Now, the economy is approaching that threshold. The unemployment rate was 6.7 percent in February, but there remains little agreement over how fast the Fed may need to act once that milestone is met.

The unemployment rate has fallen faster than officials expected as workers retire or leave the labor force discouraged. Some officials believe the Fed should keep interest rates low until the economy is close to full employment — or even beyond that point — in an effort to recapture those lost workers. Others argue that keeping rates low for too long risks stoking inflation and financial instability.

On Wednesday, Yellen indicated that the low level of inflation gives the Fed plenty of room to maneuver. Even after the first rate hike, Fed officials could decide to keep interest rates below their normal level of 4 percent for some time.

“The committee, today, for the first time, endorsed that” in its official statement, Yellen said.

But a survey of Fed officials released Wednesday suggests that future increases could come more rapidly. Four officials think rates could be at 1 percent at the end of 2015, two more than in December. By the end of 2016, a growing number of officials believe, rates could be 2 percent or higher. Yellen called those moves a “very limited upward drift.”

Fed officials also slightly lowered their forecasts for economic growth to 2.8 to 3 percent this year and 3 to 3.2 percent next year. However, they predicted the unemployment rate will fall more quickly, reaching 6.1 to 6.3 percent this year and 5.6 to 5.9 percent in 2015. There was little change in the inflation forecast.

The Fed’s policy-setting committee approved the statement 8 to 1. Minneapolis Fed President Narayana Kocherlakota dissented over concerns that the statement did not emphasize the Fed’s commitment to meeting its 2 percent target for inflation. He has advocated for a more definitive promise not to raise rates until the jobless rate hits 5.5 percent.

But Yellen said Wednesday that the Fed believes inflation will slowly but surely rise.

“We do not want to undershoot inflation for a prolonged period of time,” she said, adding, “If the committee had real concerns that inflation were going to remain persistently below 2 percent, I feel confident that the committee would act to prevent that.”

In addition, the Fed voted to continue reducing the amount of money it is pumping into the economy. The Fed has been buying bonds to help push down long-term interest rates and boost demand from consumers and businesses. Over its past two meetings, the Fed scaled back those purchases by \$20 billion to \$65 billion. It will cut the amount to \$55 billion.

Yellen’s Fed Votes For ‘modest’ Easing Of Stimulus

Central bank sees U.S. economy still on the mend

By Patrice Hill

[Washington Times](#), March 20, 2014

The Federal Reserve Wednesday said it will continue easing its stimulus program for the economy, cutting its purchases of U.S. Treasury and mortgage bonds by another \$10 billion a month.

The central bank, after a two-day meeting of its policy committee, said in a statement that the U.S. economy grew more slowly this winter in part because of unusually cold and snowy weather in much of the country. It said the outlook for better growth and continuing job improvement was otherwise the same as it was late last year when the central bank first began paring back its stimulus.

“Unusually harsh weather has made judging the underlying strength in the economy especially challenging,” said Fed Chair Janet Yellen, in her first news conference since taking over the central bank earlier this year, in explaining the Fed’s moves. She added that the economy overall continues to exhibit mixed signs of improvement, even without the bad weather.

Ms. Yellen made it clear that the Fed wants to continue to nurture the job market, though the new statement removed a reference to the unemployment rate seen in previous statements. The Fed had previously said it would start to consider raising interest rates if unemployment fell to 6.5 percent, but that statement was removed as the unemployment rate has now fallen to 6.7 percent despite only middling gains in employment.

“We know we’re not close to the full employment rate” despite the more rapid fall in unemployment than the Fed expected, she said.

While the economy continues to need some support from near-zero interest rates and the \$55 billion of bond purchases that remain on schedule each month, she said, the Fed sees “sufficient underlying strength in the broader economy to support ongoing improvement in the labor market.”

The Fed statement gave no sign interest rates were about to rise, even as the stimulus tapering continues.

The rate-setting committee “continues to anticipate ... that it likely will be appropriate to maintain the current target

range for the federal funds rate for a considerable time after the asset purchase program ends, especially if projected inflation continues to run below the committee's 2 percent longer-run goal, and provided that longer-term inflation expectations remain well anchored," the statement said.

Ms. Yellen may have made a first small slip-up in her efforts to explain when the Fed might start to consider raising short-term rates, which have been near zero since December 2008, after removing its previous guidance specifying a 6.5 percent unemployment rate. The small gaffe sparked a minor sell-off in New York financial markets even as she was speaking Wednesday afternoon.

She said that the Fed would probably start looking at increasing interest rates "as early as six months" after it ends its bond stimulus programs, which at the current pace of removing stimulus at a rate of \$10 billion each month, would end in October of this year.

That led many investors to jump to the conclusion that the Fed might start raising short-term interest rates a year from now — much earlier than markets expected — driving the Dow Jones Industrial Average down as much as 209 points at one point even as Ms. Yellen was speaking.

The market recovered a bit, with the Dow closing the day down 114.02 point, or 0.7 percent to 16,222.17. The broader Standard & Poor's and the tech-heavy Nasdaq markets were also both off 0.6 percent for the day.

However, Ms. Yellen made clear in her news conference that the Fed wants to maintain its flexibility and respond to economic developments that she said could either speed up its schedule of so-called "tapering" or delay it if the economy proves weaker than expected.

"It will be a considerable period after ending stimulus before the committee considers it appropriate to raise rates," she said. "Even after employment and inflation near [levels targeted by the Fed], conditions may warrant keeping interest rates below normal levels."

For one thing, she noted, average wage growth in the U.S. has been at about half of historical levels, coming in at an annual rate of 2 percent rather than the 3 percent to 4 percent seen in past economic recoveries. That, the Fed chair said, posed virtually no threat of the kind of wage inflation that historically has prompted the Fed to start raising rates.

Fed Tweaks Rate Guidance, Affirms Easy-Money Tilt

Bond-Buying Program Cut by Another \$10 Billion

By Victoria McGrane And Jon Hilsenrath

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Yellen Speaks; Clarity Weak; Stocks Squeak

By Kevin G. Hall

[McClatchy](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve continued tapering its controversial bond purchases on Wednesday, trimming back another \$10 billion a month in April and signaling clearly that it expects to promote low borrowing rates well beyond the end of its stimulus efforts.

In announcing the move, new Fed Chairwoman Janet Yellen said there is "sufficient underlying strength to support ongoing improvement in the labor market."

With the economic recovery appearing to shift into higher gear, the Fed began cutting back its purchases of government and mortgage bonds, reducing last year's pace of \$85 billion a month in total purchases by \$10 billion in January and another \$10 billion in February. Wednesday's announcement, taking effect in April, slows the Fed's purchases to a pace of \$55 billion a month.

Financial markets watched Yellen's first news conference closely for signs of daylight between her policies and those of her predecessor, Ben Bernanke. They didn't like what they heard, or thought they heard, on the timing of future Fed actions.

The Dow Jones industrial average was down 190 points during much of Yellen's first news conference, leveling off a bit at the close. The Dow Jones lost 114.02 points on the day to close at 16,222.17. The S&P 500 ended off 11.48 points to 1860.17, and the NASDAQ finished 25.71 points lower to 4307.60.

What ignited the sell-off was Yellen's potential time frame for raising rates after the end of the bond purchases, expected in December. She suggested "something on the order of six months," but she qualified repeatedly that inflation remains stubbornly below target and would be a factor to weigh.

"Our view is that this could have been a rookie gaffe on Yellen's part. This was, after all, her first press conference," said Paul Edelstein, director of financial economics for forecaster IHS Global Insight. "The balance of what we learned today was dovish, not hawkish. We, therefore, maintain our expectation for the first rate hike in late 2015."

Like first light breaking a distant horizon, the Fed's revised economic forecast sees the benchmark federal funds rate at 1 percent at the end of 2015 and 2 percent in 2016. That, too, helped focus markets on the coming end of the sugar high received from the bond purchases, which have boosted stock prices.

The further slowdown in bond purchases was expected, but it was not unanimous and featured a dissent for reasons that might provoke controversy as the Fed tries to return monetary policy to normalcy.

The dissent came from Narayana Kocherlakota, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, who opposed new language that he felt "weakens the credibility"

of the Fed's commitment to return inflation to a target between 1 percent and 2 percent.

The language in question involves Yellen's desire to provide more guidance about what the Fed might do after it has stopped buying government and mortgage bonds late this year or early next year. The Fed statement said benchmark lending rates are expected to stay near zero, where they've been since December 2008, "for a considerable time after the asset purchase program ends, especially if projected inflation continues to run below" the Fed's 2 percent longer-run goal.

That promise, held Kocherlakota, "fosters policy uncertainty that hinders the economy."

To counter those concerns, Yellen took great pains during her opening statement and throughout the press conference to amplify scenarios under which the Fed could begin to raise rates, an action that is usually done to put the brakes on an economy growing too hot.

The new Fed chief also defended the decision to change guidance and remove an unemployment rate of 6.5 percent as a sign that the Fed will consider raising rates. That number originally had been viewed as an important signpost, but Yellen on Wednesday said it is effectively inconsequential because "we are not close to full employment."

Measures of underemployment and stress in the labor market remain elevated, she added.

Big developing economies such as Brazil have complained that the tapering has been disruptive because investors are fleeing those nations for safer, albeit less lucrative bets in the United States. Critics of the Fed effort complain it is akin to printing money and could eventually spark inflation, although there is little sign of looming inflation anywhere right now.

The Fed also revised its December outlook, with the central tendency of projections from Fed governors and presidents slightly more optimistic on hiring and slightly more pessimistic on growth. The projections now see growth in range of 2.8 percent to 3 percent this year instead of a range as fast as 3.2 percent as envisioned in December.

Similarly, the projections for the unemployment rate in 2014 are now between 6.1 percent and 6.3 percent, instead of the range of 6.3 percent to 6.6 percent envisioned in December.

The Fed Chair's Debut: Dull With Dash Of Folksy

By Ben White

[Politico](#), March 20, 2014

Janet Yellen was boring. And that's exactly what she wanted to be.

The newly installed Federal Reserve chair, in her first big policy meeting and news conference, gently nudged the

central bank away from its extraordinary easy-money policies and toward a more normal footing in a way that only mildly upset markets, which sank a bit on the slightly more hawkish tone.

Yellen, the first female chair in the Fed's history, will also probably avoid much partisan criticism from either side following a performance in which she expertly wrapped some fairly significant policy changes in the kind of soothingly gauzy language that is the hallmark of successful central bankers.

Indeed, Yellen's deep experience as Fed vice chair and president of the San Francisco Fed showed up in a performance in which she was by turns wonky, folksy and forceful about her views on the economy. She said she felt the "weight" of leading the world's most important central bank and plans to do the job in much the same way as her predecessor, Ben Bernanke.

"He had a very good agenda and it's one I shared," she said.

There were no huge gaffes (maybe a little one). There were no shocking policy changes. But there were a few new conversational phrases thrown in the mix.

What follows are the top takeaways from the Fed chair's first big performance.

Yellen is no super dove

Some Republicans and moderate Democrats feared that Yellen, who beat out former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers for the Fed chair job, would err heavily on the side of bringing down the long-term jobless rate even if that meant risking higher inflation.

That's not happening.

Yellen and the Fed's policy-setting panel — the Federal Open Market Committee — said economic weakness so far this year was at least in part the result of the brutal winter and that things should improve in the spring. "Unusually harsh weather in January and February has made assessing the underlying strength of the economy especially challenging," Yellen said while seated behind a desk at the start of her news conference at the Fed's imposing headquarters in Washington.

Yellen and the Fed continued the so-called taper, reducing its monthly asset purchases by a further \$10 billion to \$55 billion and keeping the central bank on a course set by Bernanke to get out of the bond-buying business by the end of the year. Barring some shock, the Fed will keep cutting back purchases at each FOMC meeting. That should please Republican populists such as Republican Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul who regularly beat up on the Fed for "printing money" and allegedly devaluing the dollar.

But Yellen had something for Democrats as well who want the central bank to keep juicing the economy as much as possible through the midterm elections this fall. The Fed has previously said that the magic number for when it might begin to consider raising short-term interest rates is when

unemployment hits 6.5 percent. But with that number within reach — it currently stands at 6.7 percent — Yellen and the Fed simply dropped using the target as an indicator, instead referring to more vague “labor market conditions.”

(QUIZ: Do you know Janet Yellen?)

Yellen made clear interest rate policy would stay easy well into next year, if not 2016. Economic projections released by the Fed show the central bank coalescing around 2015 as the time it might start lifting its benchmark from the rock-bottom level where it's been since 2008.

She's also not perfect

Yellen did cause a bit of anxiety on Wall Street at one point when she was asked to be more specific on when the Fed might start hiking rates after it winds down its bond-buying by the end of the year.

In its statement, the Fed said it would keep rates low for a “considerable period” after the end of asset purchases.

Asked what a “considerable period” was, Yellen suggested it was “hard to define” but “probably means something on the order of around a six-month period or so.” That's quite a bit more specific than many expected. Fed chairs tend not to want to commit themselves to any kind of timetable for action.

“The ‘six months’ reference to timing on rate increases was a mistake,” said John Makin, an economist and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. “It is a break from ‘conditionality’ that emphasize dependence on economic data — as the minutes do. She tried to qualify but I think her eagerness to please hawks and the press got the better of her.”

Still, Makin and others gave Yellen high marks on her first news conference. “It was surprising but I don't place much weight on it,” Pantheon Macroeconomics' Ian Shepherdson said of the “six-month” comment. “I guess the pressure of the occasion got to her. Otherwise her performance was solid, she did her best to make the dove case, having been dealt a poor hand by her colleagues, nudging up their rate forecasts.”

Stocks quickly sold off following the “six-month” comment but recovered later as investors got more comfortable that the remark was hardly a firm policy commitment and was not really out of line with what the FOMC said in its consensus projections. It also happens to be exactly the consensus among Wall Street analysts for when the Fed will start bumping up rates.

After the initial sell-off, the Dow closed off less than 1 percent. And the yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose less than 1 percent to 2.772, hardly big moves at all. Yellen is clearly moving the Fed gently toward a tighter policy, and she and the rest of the FOMC must be pleased that Wall Street took it in stride.

She's folksy

Yellen, who frequently broke into a restrained smile during the question-and-answer session, was definitely more loose and jokey than Bernanke, who initiated the Fed news conferences, or his predecessor Alan Greenspan, who rarely spoke publicly outside of congressional hearings. She clearly relished her first big moment in the spotlight, mixing wonkiness with humor.

She joked that reporters and others should not obsess over the “dot plot” that tracks where each FOMC member expects the Fed's benchmark interest rate to be at the end of next year. In describing the current housing market and state of the economy, Yellen said “there are a lot of kids who are shacking up with their families and probably would like to be going out and acquiring places of their own,” a formulation you would probably not have heard from Bernanke or Greenspan.

When asked about a broad range of scenarios that might cause the Fed to think twice about winding down its asset purchases, Yellen seemed to suppress a bit of a laugh and said she “wouldn't go to such extremes.”

She also spoke about her own efforts to keep in touch with regular people affected by the tough economy and labor market. “I'd be surprised if anyone in this room doesn't know someone who has been touched by the crisis,” she said. “That's true of me and my family and friends.”

She will be a lot like Bernanke

Yellen went out of her way to praise her predecessor and pledged that her tenure would be very similar to his.

“We are committed to the exact same set of goals,” she said. “My goal, and I will throw myself into this as wholeheartedly as I can, is to make rapid progress, as rapid progress as we possibly can, in getting this recovery back on track and putting Americans back to work.”

Yellen added that she would follow up on Bernanke's “large inroads” in strengthening the financial system through better regulations and addressing “too big to fail” banks. “He had a very good agenda and it's one I shared and it's why I came to Washington to be vice chair,” she said.

Her only slight criticism of the Bernanke-led Fed was for the first statement issued this year that was fairly bullish on the state of the economy. “We probably overdid the optimism in January,” she said. Otherwise, she praised Bernanke's asset-purchase policy and the use of the unemployment target, even though many analysts think that target was a mistake.

She's not very worried about Ukraine

Asked if the crisis in Ukraine was a headwind for the U.S. economy, Yellen suggested it was not, at least not yet.

“It's something that we are monitoring very closely,” she said. “The direct trade linkages or exposures of the U.S. banking system to the Ukraine and Russia are not large; we are not seeing meaningful impacts now. But obviously there

are geopolitical risks here that it's very important for us to be attentive to and keep our eye on."

She also refused to comment on a question regarding Russia possibly moving money out of accounts held at the New York Fed to avoid U.S. sanctions.

And with that Yellen breezed out of the room with a smile, having encountered just one slight bump on an otherwise sedate and successful first encounter with the press as the face of the most powerful financial institution on earth.

Non-Guidance Fed Guidance

Yellen drops the 6.5% jobless rate target in favor of her hip pocket.

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

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Fed Comments Spook Investors; Shares Fall

Traders See Hints of Higher Rates Earlier Than Expected

By Alexandra Scaggs And Min Zeng

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 20, 2014

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

IRS: \$760 Million In 2010 Refunds Unclaimed

By Gregory Korte

[USA Today](#), March 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — If the Internal Revenue Service is looking for you, it could be a good thing.

The tax agency said Wednesday it owes money to 918,600 taxpayers who did not file a 2010 tax return. Total amount up for grabs: more than \$760 million.

But you have to file your 2010 tax return by April 15 to claim it. After that, the money becomes the property of the U.S. Treasury.

"The window is quickly closing for people who are owed refunds from 2010 who haven't filed a tax return," IRS Commissioner John Koskinen said. He said students and part-time workers often neglect to file and could be due a refund.

The average refund due from over-withholding is \$571. That doesn't include the Earned Income Tax Credit, which was worth as much as \$5,666 in 2010. Married couples with three children filing jointly could make as much as \$48,362 in 2010 and be eligible for the credit.

Taxpayers who are owed a refund do not have to pay a penalty for filing late. But their 2010 tax refund could be held if they haven't filed a tax refund for 2011 or 2012 or owe money for child support.

Eric Holder Slams Toyota While Announcing \$1.2 Billion Settlement

By Kevin Robillard

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Toyota will pay a record settlement of more than \$1.2 billion to resolve a federal investigation into its disclosure of deadly safety flaws that caused vehicles to suddenly accelerate, Attorney General Eric Holder announced Wednesday morning while laying out a blistering critique of the giant automaker's actions.

The settlement will allow Toyota to avoid criminal prosecution. The sudden acceleration problem, which was linked to faulty floor mats and accelerator pedals, resulted in the recall of more than 9 million cars worldwide and was tied to 37 deaths.

"We can say for certain that Toyota intentionally concealed information and misled the public about safety issues," Holder said at a news conference in Washington, adding: "Rather than promptly disclosing and correcting safety issues about which they were aware, Toyota made misleading public statements to consumers and gave inaccurate facts to members of Congress."

The settlement shows the Justice Department is willing to aggressively pursue automakers under a 2000 law giving it the power to prosecute those who mislead federal regulators about safety problems. Holder said he hopes the case serves as a warning for other automakers.

"The announcement that I am making today, I think, is reflective of the aggressive nature we will take in looking at these kinds of charges," he said. "I think this is a sign for the industry that we take these matters seriously and that individuals and corporations will be held accountable."

The settlement comes as General Motors faces increasing scrutiny and a reported criminal investigation into how it handled a problem with ignition locks that has been linked to at least 12 deaths. Heavy key chains can cause the locks to slip, shutting off vehicles and leading to sudden stops and preventing airbags from deploying.

General Motors first became aware of problems more than a decade ago and has recalled 1.6 million cars worldwide because of the problem. U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Preet Bharara, whose office handled the Toyota case, is also reportedly investigating GM.

At one point during the press conference, Bharara misspoke and said "General Motors" instead of "Toyota," drawing laughter and smirks from reporters and officials. The slip-up came minutes after Holder refused to confirm or deny whether the Justice Department was investigating GM.

Toyota's sudden acceleration problems first drew attention in August 2009, after a family of four driving a Lexus ES390 died when a faulty floor mat trapped the accelerator pedal. As the car sped past 100 miles an hour, the family

called 911 and told a dispatcher: "We're going north on 125 and our accelerator is stuck ... There's no brakes. ... Hold on ... hold on and pray." The call ended with the sound of the crash.

After the crash drew scrutiny from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the media, Toyota agreed to recall 5.2 million cars across eight models in November 2009. But it chose not to recall three models — including the Toyota Corolla, one of the best-selling cars in the U.S. — even though they had similar floor mat problems. It also didn't tell NHTSA it knew of problems with sticky accelerator pads.

Bharara said Toyota was "jubilant" following the limited 2009 recall because the company was set to save \$100 million. Toyota "cared more about its own brand and bottom line than the truth," he said.

Still, the Toyota's stance did draw some criticism inside the company. After the company played down the problems with the sticky pedals in a 2010 presentation to NHTSA, one Toyota employee exclaimed, "Idiots! Someone will go to jail if lies are repeatedly told. I can't support this."

The company soon admitted the broader problems and expanded the recall to 9 million cars worldwide — even though it still provided a misleading timeline to NHTSA showing it had discovered the sticky pedals only a few months earlier, long after the first reports of a problem actually emerged in 2007.

Holder and Bharara said Toyota repeatedly went out of its way to hide the full extent of the problem from consumers, regulators and Congress to protect the company's reputation.

"Toyota confronted a public safety emergency as if it was simply a public relations problem," Holder said, adding later: "Put simply, Toyota's conduct was shameful. It showed a blatant disregard for systems and laws designed to look after the safety of consumers."

In a separate statement Wednesday morning, Toyota said it has made "fundamental changes" in its operations since the 2009-10 recalls. "We have gone back to basics ... to put our customers first," it added.

"At the time of these recalls, we took full responsibility for any concerns our actions may have caused customers, and we rededicated ourselves to earning their trust," said Christopher Reynolds, chief legal officer of Toyota Motor North America. Among other changes, he said, Toyota has "taken a number of steps that have enabled us to enhance quality control, respond more quickly to customer concerns, strengthen regional autonomy and speed decision-making."

"Importantly, Toyota addressed the sticky pedal and floor mat entrapment issues with effective and durable solutions, and we stand behind the safety and quality of our vehicles," Reynolds said.

Under the agreement, Toyota admitted to misleading American consumers about the problem. The company also agreed to have an independent monitor review and assess its

handling of safety issues. The agreement also includes a single charge of wire fraud against Toyota, which the government will dismiss in three years if the company abides by the agreement.

Bharara said the massive size of the settlement is important because of "the relatively paltry size of the penalties Congress has authorized the Department of Transportation to pursue." Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said the department was able to levy \$66 million worth of fines against Toyota.

Safety advocates have long called for NHTSA to be able to levy heavier fines against automakers, but intense lobbying by automakers has beaten back prior attempts. The maximum is now \$35 million per infraction, but senators had proposed increasing the maximum to \$250 million when negotiating the most recent surface transportation bill in 2012.

The maximums were increased in 2000 as part of the TREAD Act, which overhauled how NHTSA handles recalls after a disastrous series of accidents involving Firestone tires and Ford Explorers. Hundreds of deaths were eventually linked to the faulty tires. The law also gave federal prosecutors the power to criminally charge individuals and companies for misleading auto safety regulators.

Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.), now the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, wrote the 2000 law. His committee and a Senate Commerce consumer protection subcommittee chaired by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) have both announced investigations of GM and NHTSA's handling of the ignition lock recall.

Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) praised the deal.

"The Justice Department's settlement with Toyota should put all automakers on notice: There is absolutely no excuse for misleading the public or concealing information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration," Rockefeller said in a statement. "Lives are at risk when this happens. Safety must always be the first priority for manufacturers, regardless of how it affects profit margins."

Toyota's \$1.2 billion payment will head to a federal asset forfeiture fund, from which victims could seek money. But many victims of the sudden acceleration problem have already settled lawsuits against Toyota or are continuing to pursue them.

Because of a provision in the settlement, Toyota will not be able to take a tax break on the fine.

Kim Dixon contributed to this report.